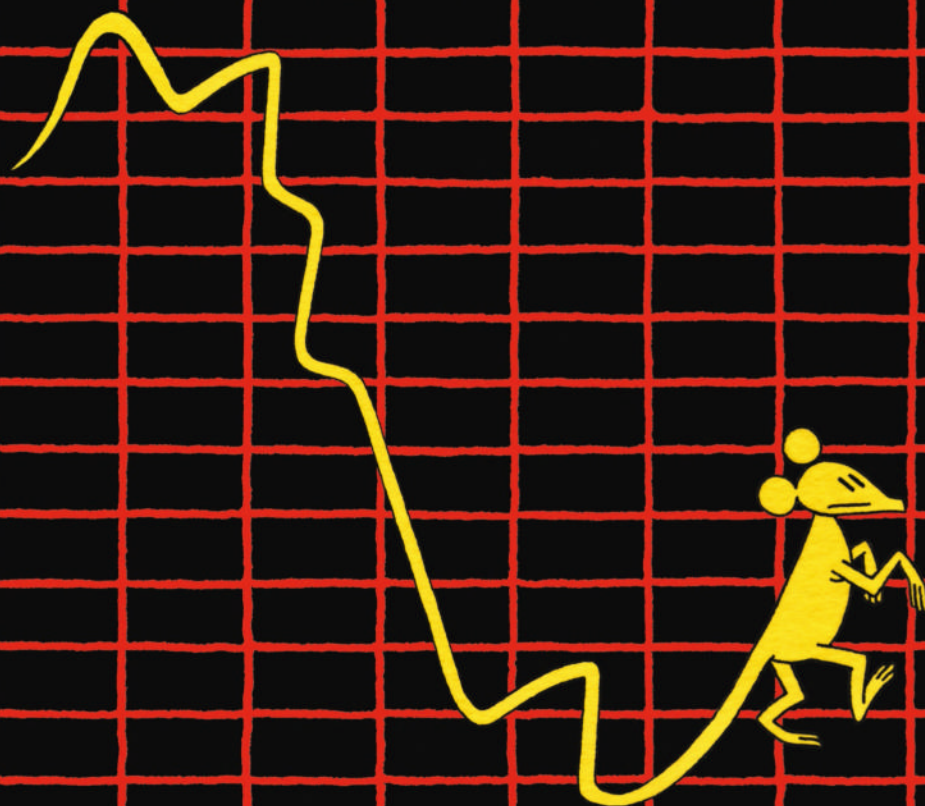


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AFTER THE VOICE

THE NEW YORKER

SEPTEMBER 7, 2015

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FICTION: On the hundredth episode of the Fiction Podcast, *Lionel Shriver* reads T. C. Boyle's "Chicxulub," and chats with *Deborah Treisman* about the story.

PODCASTS: On the Political Scene, *Evan Osnos* and *Dorothy Wickenden* discuss Donald Trump's candidacy. Plus, on *Out Loud*, *Nick Paumgarten*, *Reeves Wiedeman*, *Amelia Lester*, and *David Haglund* talk about tennis, *Serena Williams*, and the U.S. Open.

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THE MAIL

ATTICUS AND AMERICA

Adam Gopnik's article about "Go Set a Watchman" attributes the longevity of "To Kill a Mockingbird" in America's literary memory to Harper Lee's depiction of childhood (Books, July 27th). Consider that the release of "Watchman" coincided with furor over the Confederate flag: at the same time that we are acknowledging the flag's evocation of racism, we're discovering that Atticus Finch—a beloved moral and civic authority—is a bigoted old man. We stumble upon the unmistakable truth that, even as much of this country has been congratulating itself for progress in race relations, injustice endures. Atticus is not, in either of Lee's novels, another Dylann Roof, the white supremacist who confessed to the murder of nine members of the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, in Charleston. But our reverence for the good lawyer and the enshrinement of "To Kill a Mockingbird" as the conscience of America have required the same sort of complacent historical vision that allows the Confederate flag to fly atop state buildings. Rereading "To Kill a Mockingbird," and noting its flaws and dated remarks, one can find foreshadowing of both the grief in "Go Set a Watchman" and the inevitability of Dylann Roof.

*Ben Slote
Meadville, Pa.*

I grew up in Virginia during the same years in which "Go Set a Watchman" takes place, and among people not unlike those in Lee's novels—not exactly deep Alabama, but definitely the South. Gopnik writes that "Watchman" would have been stronger if Calpurnia had not shaken her head no when Scout asked, "Did you hate us?" Perhaps you had to be from the South to feel, as I do, that Calpurnia's no is not only credible; it is an index of the ambivalence that haunts the world that Lee described in her fiction, which is not so different from the real world she oc-

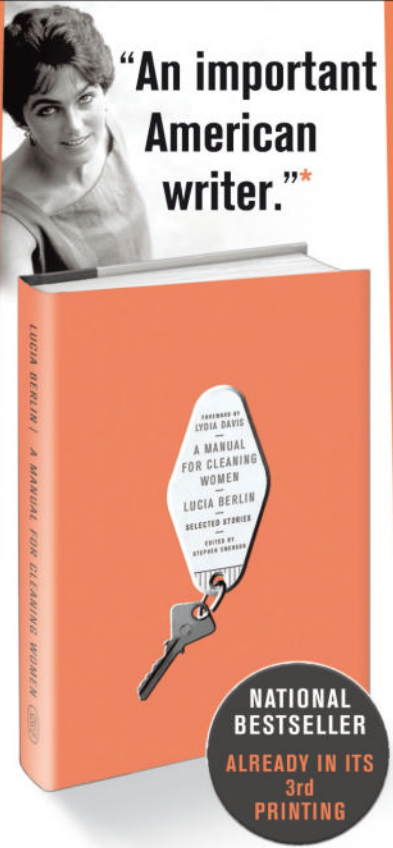
cupies. Despite our long-standing tendency to assess matters of race in the South in terms of black and white, literally and figuratively, the truth is more ambiguous. It is gray and shadowy, a liminal terrain—one that Calpurnia would know well. It seems to me that more of us dwell there than we may care to acknowledge. In her novels, Lee has shown readers the reality of their surroundings. And that is a courageous and strong accomplishment, in literature and also in life.

*Lynn Walterick
Media, Pa.*

I read "Go Set a Watchman" with trepidation and skepticism. I believe the book should never have been published, and, indeed, when the manuscript was submitted to an editor, Lee was asked to revise it. Atticus may have been a racist in Lee's original draft, but he became the Atticus we all love when she wrote the final version of her novel. She gave Atticus depth and courage. She chose to focus on the young and precocious Scout instead of the young woman she depicted in "Watchman." She included a fleshed-out character in Jem, Scout's brother. She created Boo Radley and many other extraordinary characters, to bring to life a particular world, that of the Old South of the nineteen-thirties. These figures are part of folklore now. "Watchman" should have been locked away forever in a drawer somewhere. No one will convince me that the elderly and ill Harper Lee was fully aware that she had approved its publication. I hope that readers of the novel will see it as a publisher's hustle at the expense of a beloved author, who unfortunately was in no position to stop its release.

*Doris Forest
Westport, Conn.*

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. We regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter or return letters.



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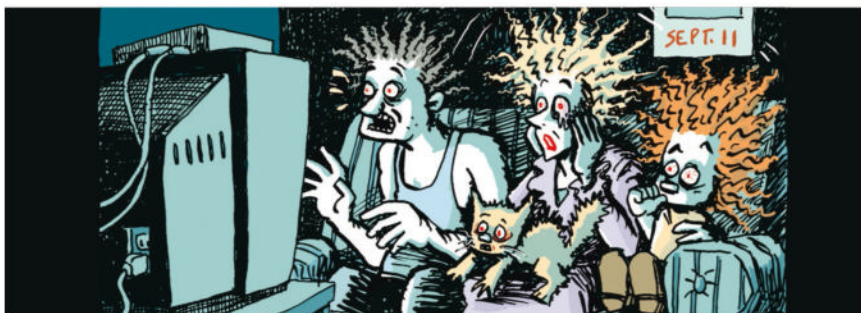
GOING ON ABOUT TOWN

SEPTEMBER 2015 WEDNESDAY 2ND THURSDAY 3RD FRIDAY 4TH SATURDAY 5TH SUNDAY 6TH MONDAY 7TH TUESDAY 8TH

NINE YEARS BEFORE “HAMILTON,” the 2006 musical “Spring Awakening” gave the American stage a fresh sound. Duncan Sheik and Steven Sater’s adaptation of the 1891 Frank Wedekind drama set the repressed sexuality of nineteenth-century German teen-agers against the modern release of rock and dance. The show won a slew of Tony Awards, including Best Musical, but closed on Broadway after little more than two years. Fortunately, it’s back, in an inventive revival by Deaf West Theatre. Performed in sign language and spoken English (characters are double-cast with deaf and hearing actors), Michael Arden’s production, at the Brooks Atkinson, features more than twenty performers making their Broadway debuts, including Austin McKenzie and Sandra Mae Frank, as the lovers Melchior and Wendla.

CLASSICAL MUSIC | ART
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PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL MARCELLE



Marco Cappelli brings a musical version of Art Spiegelman's "In the Shadow of No Towers" to the Stone.

GET STONED

John Zorn's music space highlights pathbreaking guitarists.

IF THERE'S ONE INSTRUMENT THAT sums up the spectrum of possibilities at the Stone, the snuffbox-size room for avant-garde performance that John Zorn established on Avenue C in 2005, it would be the guitar, which has inspired expert practitioners across the classical, jazz, folk, rock, and experimental-music genres. September is a great month to hear three of the best of them, in an array of concerts which reveals Zorn's light but lasting control over the venue's programming.

The young American guitarists Gyan Riley and Julian Lage represent, between them, a broad range of interests: Riley, a son of the legendary composer Terry Riley, has deep roots in the classical and contemporary realms, while Lage, who produces silken sounds with effortless ease, is a master of both jazz and folk idioms. Their upcoming collaboration (on Sept. 6), however, is the latest iteration of "John Zorn's Bagatelles," a series in which a varied group of musicians interpret selections from a new collection of some three hundred miniature works by Zorn. Riley will be playing on nylon strings, Lage on (acoustic) steel strings, and each loves to improvise.

The Italian virtuoso Marco Cappelli, who has taught at Columbia for several years, will enjoy a full residency at the Stone (Sept. 8-13). His concerts cover an astonishingly broad range of musical material and mood. One will combine the lute songs of Dowland with the postwar guitar music of Henze (which, according to Cappelli, share a questing, avant-garde spirit); another offers a radical reinterpretation (with the jazz-experimental vocalist Rosalie Kaplan) of Britten's "Songs from the Chinese," with Cappelli using a different guitar on each of the six songs; and Cappelli's group Italian Surf Academy will have fun with tunes from the soundtracks of films by Sergio Leone and Mario Bava. The tone turns serious in a musical realization of Art Spiegelman's 9/11 graphic elegy "In the Shadow of No Towers," a collaboration that features projections by the visual designer Maria Isabel Gouverneur and the video artist Anne Rothschild, with narration by the actor John Turturro.

—Russell Platt



CLASSICAL MUSIC

CONCERTS IN TOWN

Metropolitan Opera Summer HD Festival

To whet the public appetite for the season to come, the Met presents its annual round of summer screenings of operatic performances from the company's burgeoning library of HD broadcasts. The free series concludes with presentations of "Cosi Fan Tutte," "Il Trittico," "Roméo et Juliette," "La Traviata," "Don Giovanni," and "Aida"; the stars include Isabel Leonard, Stephanie Blythe, Anna Netrebko, Natalie Dessay, Roberto Alagna, Mariusz Kwiecien, and the late Salvatore Licitra. (Lincoln Center Plaza. Sept. 2 at 7:30, Sept. 3-4 and Sept. 6 at 7:45, and Sept. 5 and Sept. 7 at 8. No tickets required.)

Peking Opera Productions

The David H. Koch Theatre, which has presented a Chinese dance drama every year since 2012, turns its attention to the motley beauty of traditional Peking opera, with its distinctive vocal effects (slides and bent pitches), mime, and elaborate costumes. Zhang Huoding, one of the genre's leading lights, makes her U.S. debut in two classics that draw heavily on Chinese myth, "Legend of the White Snake" and "The Jewelry Purse," presented on successive evenings. (Lincoln Center. davidhkotheater.com. Sept. 2-3 at 8.)

Bargemusic "Here and Now Festival"

A hallmark of Mark Peskanov's tenure at the floating chamber-music series is his tradition of holding several stylistically probing concerts of new music during the long Labor Day weekend. The world premieres of David Del Tredici's "To Be Sung on the Water" and Dalit Warshaw's "Encounters" and "Ballade," as well as the New York premieres of Morton Subotnick's "Falling Leaves" and John Zorn's "Zeitgehöft," feature among the works to be presented. The vivid cast of performers includes several of New York's most valued musical personnel, such as the pianists Kathleen Supové and Ron Stabinsky, the violinists Jennifer Choi and Peskanov, the cellists Samuel Magill and Michael Nicholas, and the percussionist Kevin Shea. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. bargemusic.org. Sept. 2 and Sept. 4-5 at 8 and Sept. 6 at 4.)

La Monte Young's "Trio for Strings"

The three-hour version of Young's sensuous and transcendent work from 1958—for many, the seminal work of musical minimalism—receives a long-overdue U.S. premiere. Listeners will sit on cushions on the carpeted floor of Dia:Chelsea's Dream House, designed by Young

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and Marian Zazeela, to ride the hours alongside the Theatre of Eternal Music String Ensemble, which will perform the piece. (545 W. 22nd St. www.diaart.org. Sept. 3 and Sept. 5 at 9.)

The Stone

Guitarists do not completely rule the roost at this vibrant Lower East Side performance space (see "Get Stoned"). On Wednesday, as part of a residency organized by the Canadian drummer and composer Harris Eisenstadt, New York's TILT Brass performs Eisenstadt's "Aberikula," a work for brass quartet inspired by the rhythms of Cuban drumming. And on Monday, the composer Annie Gosfield, one of the great stalwarts of the downtown music scene, presents a Labor Day bash that offers a broad selection of her compositions for electronic and acoustic instruments, influenced by the music of Debussy, the signal noise of the Sputnik satellite, and a myriad of other found sounds. The fine performers include the violinist Jennifer Choi, the guitarist Roger Kleier, and the trombonist Brian Drye, with the composer on sampler. (Ave. C at 2nd St. thestonenyc.com. Sept. 2 at 10 and Sept. 7 at 8.)

OUT OF TOWN

Skaneateles Festival

For those hardy souls who wish to travel westward as summer melts away, there is this longtime festival, nestled in New York's Finger Lakes region. The illustrious Miró Quartet is featured in two concerts on the festival's final weekend. In the first, the group offers string quartets by Haydn (Op. 76, No. 2, "Fifths") and Beethoven as well as Schumann's Piano Quintet (with Aaron Wunsch, one of the series' directors); in the second, the group is joined by the young Aeolus Quartet in octets for strings by Mendelssohn and the contemporary composer Dan Welcher ("Museon Polemos," a freewheeling "battle of the bands"). The festival wraps up with the renowned saxophonist Joshua Redman, who joins the most versatile of American quartets, Brooklyn Rider, in a new work by the jazz composer Patrick Zimmerli ("Aspects of Darkness and Light"). (Skaneateles, N.Y. skanfest.org. Sept. 3-4 at 8 and Sept. 5 at 7:30.)

Musical Mountain

The ebullient Shanghai Quartet, a longtime favorite at the Connecticut chamber-music shrine, is in residence

for the weekend. The selections on its Saturday-evening concert include an early quartet by Haydn, prime middle-period Beethoven (the "Quartetto Serioso," Op. 95), and a work by the veteran Polish master Krzysztof Penderecki (the Quartet No. 3, "Leaves from an Unwritten Diary"). On Sunday afternoon, the group is joined by the distinguished pianist Gilbert Kalish and his keyboard colleague Jonathan Yates (the series' director) for a concert offering more Beethoven (the "Razumovsky" Quartet No. 3 in C Major) and an abundance of Brahms (a set of four-hand waltzes and the magisterial Piano Quintet in F Minor). (Falls Village, Conn. 860-824-7126. Sept. 5 at 6:30 and Sept. 6 at 3.)

Tannery Pond Concerts

This rustic yet elegant summertime series, held in a nineteenth-century Shaker tannery barn, presents a concert featuring the dynamic young cellist Edward Arron, joined by the clarinetist Todd Palmer and the pianist Gilles Vonsattel, in an evening of music by Beethoven (the Piano Trio in B-Flat Major, Op. 11), Messiaen ("Louange à l'Éternité de Jésus"), Poulenc, Debussy, Weber,

and the Swedish composer Svante Henryson, whose work "Off Pist" features a jaunty dialogue between clarinet and cello. (New Lebanon, N.Y. 888-820-1696. Sept. 5 at 8.)

South Mountain Concerts

As autumn looms, this ninety-seven-year-old Berkshires series invites a small group of blue-chip ensembles to entertain its devoted audience. The mini-season begins with an appearance by the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio, performing bedrock works by Beethoven and Brahms (the Piano Trio No. 2 in C Major), as well as the world premiere of a work by the Curtis Institute faculty composer David Ludwig ("Titania's Dream"). (Pittsfield, Mass. 413-442-2106. Sept. 6 at 3.)

Maverick Concerts

Few young American ensembles are as exciting and accomplished as the Dover Quartet, which, acclaimed around the country, makes its debut at the Maverick's serene woodland hall with string quartets by Wolf, Janáček (No. 2, "Intimate Letters"), and Schumann (No. 1 in A Minor). (Woodstock, N.Y. maverickconcerts.org. Sept. 6 at 4.)



MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum

"Chinese Textiles: Ten Centuries of Masterpieces from the Met Collection"

Just upstairs from the Costume Institute's thronged exhibit of Chinese-inspired couture, you'll find a small but noteworthy show of earlier Chinese fashion and fabric, part of the Met's centennial celebration of its Asian departments. A rare floral-patterned cloth from the Tang dynasty is, understandably, less vibrant than it was around 800 A.D., when it was made, but a Song-era scroll cover, embellished with flying birds and leaves, still gleams. By the fourteenth century, artisans were producing exuberant silk embroideries, such as a canopy decorated with two soaring phoenixes, which was likely commissioned by Mongol rulers in the Yuan capital of Dadu, now better known as Beijing. Four-century-old silk and velvet garments, including a dazzling robe with a dragon charging up its back, are more covetable than any

of Chanel's chinoiserie. Through June 19, 2016.

Museum of Modern Art

"One-Way Ticket: Jacob Lawrence's Migration Series and Other Visions of the Great Movement North"

In 1993, seven years before his death, at the age of eighty-two, Jacob Lawrence recast the title and most of the captions of a stunning suite of sixty small paintings that he had made in 1941. The pictures, in milk-based casein tempera on hardboard, detailed the exodus—beginning during the First World War—of African-Americans from the rural South to the urban North. The original title, "The Migration of the Negro," became "The Migration Series." The prolix captions were condensed and clarified, with only five of them left unedited. Art historians quail at alterations of canonical works, even by their creators. But Lawrence wasn't working for art history, even if he was making it. He wanted to change the world. This profoundly

moving show—all sixty paintings and contemporaneous works by other artists, photographers, musicians, and writers—stirs reflection on the character and the relative success of that aim. Two impressions stand out. One is the terrifying obstinacy of racial injustice on the eve of the Second World War. The other is the moral grit that was needed to overcome it. In context, "Migration" appears as a hinge of the national consciousness: inward to the untold history of African-Americans and outward to the enlightenment of the wide world. It would not have worked were it not superb art, but it is. Through Sept. 7.

Bronx Museum

"iPresente! The Young Lords in New York"

This uncommonly interesting show recounts the story of a group of young, rebellious Puerto Rican nationalists who sought empowerment for their New York communities in the late nineteen-sixties. Though their manifesto grandly called for

a Socialist society, the Young Lords concentrated on more practical goals, such as improvements to hospitals in Latino neighborhoods. They also protested institutional racism, marching alongside the short-lived Art Workers Coalition at MOMA. Fifty years later, their agitprop wears pretty thin—the show includes flags and AK-47s—but there's much to be gleaned from the documentary photographs, as well as from the pages of the Lords' bilingual newspaper, *Palante*, which dispensed beauty tips alongside demands for free health care and Puerto Rican independence. (The exhibition continues at El Museo del Barrio, on upper Fifth Avenue, and at Loisa Inc., in Alphabet City.) Through Oct. 18.

Morgan Library & Museum

"Alice: 150 Years of Wonderland"

It's a geekily grownup literary thrill to see the phrase "curiouser and curiouser" handwritten in Lewis Carroll's neat penmanship in the original manuscript that became

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"China Through the Looking Glass." Through Sept. 7.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
 "Transmissions: Art in Eastern Europe and Latin America, 1960-1980." Opens Sept. 5.

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
 "Doris Salcedo." Through Oct. 12.

WHITNEY MUSEUM
 "America Is Hard to See." Through Sept. 27.

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
 "Women of York: Shared Dining." Through Sept. 13.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
 "Life at the Limits: Stories of Amazing Species." Through Jan. 3.

NEW MUSEUM
 "Albert Oehlen: Home and Garden." Through Sept. 13.

"Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," in this sesquicentennial celebration of the book's publication. Created for Alice Liddell, the daughter of an Oxford colleague of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson's (Carroll was his pen name), and illustrated with his own drawings, the bound volume, on loan from the British Library, is at the heart of the show, open to a page with a sketch of a giraffelike Alice, a visceral symbol for the physical transformations that accompany childhood. A few masterly pencil sketches by John Tenniel, images that are now as familiar as the text itself, hang on cheerful yellow walls. (A caveat: they're too high for small viewers). The show also includes such memorabilia as an Alice-themed biscuit tin. Carroll sanctioned its production but disliked the biscuits, which he would discard before sending the containers as gifts. A few of the author's notorious photographs of

children are here, too, including a portrait of Alice Liddell in rags. Through Oct. 11.

Studio Museum in Harlem
"Stanley Whitney: Dance the Orange"

It's remarkably difficult to find words for the flustering magnetism of Whitney's color abstractions. The works in the painter's first solo museum show in New York present wobbly grids of variously sized and proportioned blocks of full-strength color in friezelike arrays, separated by brushy horizontal bands. Whitney, sixty-eight, grew up outside Philadelphia. He belongs to a generation of resiliently individualist American painters—Mary Heilmann, Thomas Nozkowski, David Reed, and Jack Whitten come to mind—who have hewed to abstraction throughout periods of art-world favor for figurative and photography-based styles, if not of blanket disdain for the oldfangled medium of oil on canvas. Whitney has earned the passionate esteem of many fellow-painters and painting aficionados; now should be his moment for wider recognition. His recent work is his finest, and the case that it makes for abstract art's not yet exhausted potencies, both aesthetic and philosophical, thrills. Through Oct. 25.

Penelope Umbrico, whose Flickr-sourced grid of blazing suns competes with the late-summer heat. Through Sept. 18. (1285 Avenue of the Americas Art Gallery, 1285 Sixth Ave. No phone.)

"Mirror Mirror: Portraits of Frida Kahlo"

The cult of Kahlo has been strong in the city this summer, thanks to a show at the New York Botanical Garden. Another handsomely stocked shrine is offered by this exhibition of photographs and mementos, including a plaster corset the artist wore while recovering from spinal injuries, decorated with images of a blood-red hammer and sickle and of an unborn child in her womb. Kahlo understood the power of a theatrical persona and transformed herself into an icon for other artists, including Imogen Cunningham, Carl Van Vechten, Manuel Alvarez Bravo, Fritz Henle, and, especially, Nickolas Murray, whose vibrant color photographs of a folkloric Frida, gazing straight at the camera, steal the show. Through Sept. 19. (Throckmorton, 145 E. 57th St. 212-223-1059.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA
Teresita Fernández

Make sure the sun is out before you visit "Fata Morgana," the American artist's serpentine public sculpture in Madison Square Park, made of dozens of suspended, reflective canopies. While the bases will mirror grass and paving stones in any weather, what makes the piece so dynamic are the beams of light that pass through its perforations, casting intricate shadows both on the ground and on passersby. (Lucky workers in nearby offices can look down and see clouds and sky.) Fernández's work here may feel closer to urban design than it does to fine art, but what of it? In the relentless heat of a New York summer, it's hard to argue with shade. Through the winter. (Madison Ave. at 25th St. 212-538-1884.)

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN
Alison Knowles

The Fluxus veteran is still best known for her 1962 performance score that reads, in its entirety, "Make a salad." But Knowles, now in her eighties, has long devoted herself to big freestanding sculptures, in which text-laden panels of wood function like the leaves of a book. In the latest version, plywood "pages" are embellished with buoys, an oar, and a bag of mussels. One features a dense collage of newspaper clippings, photographs of shells and crabs, and the frontispiece of John Cage's "Water Music." Knowles marries language and image to conjure a water world. Maritime idioms crop up on several panels: "Give a wide berth," "A shot across the bow," and "Close quarters." Also: "Know the ropes," which Knowles clearly does. Through Sept. 9. (Fuentes, 55 Delancey St. 212-577-1201.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN
Jean Laughton

In 2002, after several years spent photographing rodeos around the country, Laughton moved to the Badlands of South Dakota and embarked on a second career as a rancher. Most of the big, black-and-white pictures here were taken on horseback, and horses' ears appear at the bottom of several frames. As herds cross rivers and range over foggy pastures, Laughton fills vistas worthy of a John Ford Western with details that convey both the daily grind of working with cattle and the grandeur of ever-changing weather and light. A series of staged portraits of cowboys in fancy chaps, fringed gloves, and rakish bandannas are studies in classic Americana, straight out of a Ralph Lauren ad. Through Sept. 30. (Fordham University, 113 W. 60th St. 212-636-6073.)

"Aperture: Photographs"

The Aperture Foundation commemorates fifty years of publications with a fine, evenhanded show of pictures by fifty-two photographers. The organization's early years get special attention, with clusters of memorable images by Paul Strand, Edward Steichen, W. Eugene Smith, and Eikoh Hosoe. Others make a strong impact with only one contribution, often an unexpected image (look for a little-known Diane Arbus portrait of a dour matron) or a sharp injection of wit (see Hank Willis Thomas's shot of a grinning man's "Black Power!" gold grill). The show ends on a strong note, with a group of contemporary, process-oriented pieces by John Chiara, James Welling, and



"Baptême Chez Jafuna (Baptism at Jafuna's)" was taken by Malick Sidibé in Bamako, Mali, circa 1968. It's on view now at the Met, in the hundred-year survey "In and Out of the Studio: Photographic Portraits from West Africa."

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"The Christians," at Playwrights Horizons, explores the politics of a megachurch.

DIVINE INTERVENTION

The strange worlds of Lucas Hnath.

A WALK THROUGH THE NEW Whitney Museum reminds us of what is glorious, heart-wrenching, and unique about American art—and what makes it weird, too. The museum's curator of performance, Jay Sanders, recently showcased DANCENOISE, the potent performance duo who've done so much to break down those old theatre walls and make politics the locus of a frenzied, amusing, and thought-provoking style. One playwright who would fit well in Sanders's kind of programming is Lucas Hnath. He is an artist whose particular brand of American strangeness grows along with his strengths, many of which—a sense of high drama, and a deep understanding of how the patriarchy wants to hold on to just that—are not immediately apparent in his minimal scripts, which look, on the page, less like dialogue than like poems.

The thirty-six-year-old writer grew up strange. Raised in Orlando, he says that an early expectation was that he would become a preacher, in part because of his mother's interests. She herself enrolled in seminary when he was a teen-ager, and he sat in on her classes, picked up some Greek and Hebrew, and learned how to interpret the Bible. Translating is the playwright's job;

he must transcribe and shape what one character's soul says to another. Hnath skipped life as a pastor, he says, because he didn't want to be responsible for people's souls; he chose another way into magic and mysticism by becoming a playwright.

Soon after developing his voice at New York University—he got his M.F.A. in dramatic writing—Hnath started having his work produced; the first piece I saw was "A Public Reading of an Unproduced Screenplay About the Death of Walt Disney," in 2013, at SoHo Rep. It was about Disney, death, and legacy. As directed by Sarah Benson, the theatre's visionary director, there was something nasty about the show—not an assault on dead white men but a sneaky attack on heritage. It was hard to look at, and hard to look away. Hnath's eleventh full-length play, "The Christians," at Playwrights Horizons (in previews, opening Sept. 17), is set in a megachurch. It's also about men battling for power, but instead of money and show business the issues are influence and faith: How do we interpret, let alone control, another person's vision? And why do men fight over the right to say what they mean while grabbing everyone else's right to speak, too? For all its control on the page, "The Christians" is about the uncontrollable, which is to say, how we imagine what life will look like once we enter the everlasting.

—Hilton Als

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Desire

An evening of short plays based on the stories of Tennessee Williams, by playwrights including John Guare, Beth Henley, and David Grimm. Michael Wilson directs. Previews begin Sept. 2. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

Isolde

The experimental auteur Richard Maxwell wrote and directs this Theatre for a New Audience production, which recasts the legend of Tristan and Isolde as the story of an actress and the owner of a construction company. Previews begin Sept. 6. (Polonsky Shakespeare Center, 262 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. 866-811-4111.)

Judy

Max Posner's play, directed by Ken Rus Schmoll and featuring Birgit Huppuch, Deirdre O'Connell, and Danny Wolohan, is about a man whose wife has left him in the winter of 2040. Previews begin Sept. 1. (New Ohio, 154 Christopher St. 866-811-4111.)

Laugh It Up, Stare It Down

Chris Eigeman directs Alan Hruska's play, which follows a couple from their first meeting through old age, with many absurd challenges in between. In previews. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 866-811-4111.)

The Legend of Georgia McBride

MCC begins its season with a comedy by Matthew Lopez, directed by Mike Donahue, about an Elvis impersonator at a Florida dive bar who loses his spot to a drag show. In previews. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-352-3101.)

The Odyssey

The Public Theatre's Public Works program, which partners with community organizations from around New York City, presents a free, open-air musical adaptation of Homer's epic, written by Todd Almond and directed by Lear deBessonet. Sept. 4-7. (Delacorte, Central Park. Enter at 81st St. at Central Park W. 212-967-7555.)

Spring Awakening

Deaf West Theatre revives the 2006 indie-rock musical, by Duncan Sheik and Steven Sater, based on the Frank Wedekind drama of teen-age sexual discovery. Directed by Michael Arden and performed in sign language and spoken English. Previews begin Sept. 8. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 877-250-2929.)

Tarot Show

Opera Nouveau presents a multimedia piece created by Heather Fisch, in which tarot cards drawn by the audience determine how the evening plays out. Sept. 1-6. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-352-3101.)

NOW PLAYING

A Delicate Ship

A lopsided love triangle, Anna Ziegler's drama, produced by the Playwrights Realm, spends the night before Christmas with Sarah (Miriam Silverman), a social worker, and Sam (Matt Delapina), a musician—new lovers drunk on wine, sex, and philosophy. Knocking at the door is the ghost of relationships past: Sarah's pal Nate (Nick Westrate), a depressive third-grade teacher armed with bubbly and Cheez Doodles. A stealthy tragedy disguised as a relationship play, "A Delicate Ship" explores loneliness, memory, and the pull of the past, with the characters often stepping outside the

action to comment on it. Margot Bordelon and her designers manage shifts in time lucidly, though she sometimes allows the engaging cast to overact. Ziegler is a clever and compassionate writer, but the play feels more methodical and less consequential than it should, as though there's a wilder, darker work roiling below its smooth surface. (Peter Jay Sharp, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

Drop Dead Perfect

In this curacao-spiked pastiche, back for a return engagement, a wealthy matron and her nubile ward live in tropical splendor somewhere in the Florida Keys. Sure, the high-strung Idris (Everett Quinton) pops too many pills, and young Vivien (Jason Edward Cook) dreams of escaping to the Village, but they muddle along companionably until the arrival of a startlingly well-endowed stranger (Jason Cruz). This campy spoof by Erasmus Fenn (one strongly suspects a pseudonym) fuses "The Glass Menagerie," "I Love Lucy," the late works of Bette Davis, and several mambo records. The cross-dressing and bad puns ("Would you like a cock in the tail?") owe much to the Ridiculous Theatrical Company, which was founded by Quinton's late partner, Charles Ludlam. Though the director, Joe Brancato, encourages his cast to take the silliness seriously, the show only occasionally verges on giddy derangement. (Theatre at St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 845-786-2873.)

Love & Money

The playwright A. R. Gurney has spent decades buzzing around the discontented Wasps of Buffalo, New York. He lampoons this coterie in an unperceptive and unfunny bit of flimflam, directed by Mark Lamos, that lacks the candor of comedy or

the glee of farce. The wealthy divorcée Cornelia Cunningham (Maureen Anderman) believes herself guilty of "the major crime of having too much money." In expiation, she plans to divide her estate among the unfortunate of the earth. But one of those unfortunates, a young African-American man (Gabriel Brown), lays particular claim. He asserts that he is Cornelia's grandson and demands his share of her loot. Michael Yeargan's handsome set delights the eye; a few Cole Porter songs divert the ear. But nothing can distract from the thinness of the play's premise or the feebleness with which Gurney develops and resolves it, squandering his own rich inheritance. (Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

Whorl Inside a Loop

The co-writers Sherie Rene Scott and Dick Scanlan were on the inside, looking out. Having spent several months leading theatre workshops in a medium-security prison, they transformed the experience into this play, about a self-absorbed chanteuse (Scott) who runs a similar practicum for convicted murderers. As co-directed by Scanlan and Michael Mayer, the staging is appropriately minimal and the camaraderie among the actors rich and unforced. The show incorporates monologues written by men in the real-life workshop, and a few of these speeches, particularly one delivered with a deliberate lack of polish by Chris Myers, are standouts. But the play repeats the tired, uncomfortable trope of repurposing the suffering of minorities to help a white protagonist reflect on her life. "Only when I honestly tell my story can I honestly change my story" is the avowed theme. But whose story is really being told? (Second Stage, 305 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

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X MOVIES

OPENING

THE BLACK PANTHERS: VANGUARD OF THE REVOLUTION

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Sept. 2. (In limited release.)

STEVE JOBS: THE MAN IN THE MACHINE

Alex Gibney directed this documentary about the Apple co-founder. Opening Sept. 4. (In limited release.)

A WALK IN THE WOODS

A comedy, based on Bill Bryson's book about his hike on the Appalachian Trail. Directed by Ken Kwapis; starring Robert Redford, Nick Nolte, and Kristen Schaal. Opening Sept. 2. (In limited release.)

REVIVALS AND FESTIVALS ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

"One-Film Wonders." Sept. 2 at 6:45 and Sept. 3 at 9:15: "Limite" (1930, Mário Peixoto). • "Robert Ryan: An Actor's Actor." Sept. 4 at 9 and Sept. 7 at 7: "On Dangerous Ground" (1951, Nicholas Ray).

BAM CINÉMATEK

"Set It Off: L.A. Hip-Hop on Film." Sept. 5 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Boyz n the Hood" (1991, John Singleton). • Sept. 8 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "The Glass Shield" (1994, Charles Burnett).

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

"Gloria Grahame: Blonde Ambition." Sept. 4 at 4 and Sept. 7 at 6: "The Bad and the Beautiful" (1952, Vincente Minnelli). • Sept. 4 at 8:30 and Sept. 5 at 4: "Human Desire" (1954, Fritz Lang). • Sept. 5 at 2 and Sept. 8 at 2:30: "A Woman's Secret" (1949, Nicholas Ray).



MOVIE OF THE WEEK

A video discussion of Fritz Lang's "You and Me," from 1938, in our digital edition and online.

NOW PLAYING

American Ultra

The director Nima Nourizadeh's twisty, craftily violent, swoonily romantic young-adult action thriller is about a slacker couple who are less slack than they first seem. Mike (Jesse Eisenberg) and Phoebe (Kristen Stewart) live in a ramshackle house in rural West Virginia. He's an aspiring graphic novelist; she helps him through his panic attacks. But Mike—unbeknownst to himself—is the survivor of a failed C.I.A. experiment that turned him into a superhuman killing machine, and when agency operatives arrive to dispose of him his skills kick into full gear, surprising himself and his handlers alike, and drawing Phoebe into the fray. Nourizadeh, working with a script by Max Landis, plays Mike's bloody violence like visual guitar riffs and approaches the martial-arts set pieces with heavily underlined wit. The pathos of hidden identities doesn't arise until near the end; Eisenberg and Stewart handle the action with aplomb but have little room for emotional maneuvering. Despite the spy-centered paranoia, the film's deepest backstory involves the cruel absurdity of drug laws.—*Richard Brody* (In wide release.)

The Cobweb

The fusion of art and science, and of the personal and the professional, is dramatized with loving flamboyance in Vincente Minnelli's 1955 melodrama, set in a mental institution run by the visionary Dr. Stewart McIver (Richard Widmark). McIver guides his patients in a bold project of self-government while ignoring his capable and frustrated wife (Gloria Grahame). Meanwhile, he recruits a suicidal young artist (John Kerr) to design the clinic's drapes, which are the MacGuffin in McIver's struggle with the Old Guard, headed by a crotchety manager (Lillian Gish) and a philandering doctor (Charles Boyer). Minnelli deftly choreographs the clashes of the colorful cast—including Lauren Bacall, as a widowed art therapist, and Oscar Levant, as a grandiloquent wreck—and his wide-screen images blend the mood control of fashion photography with the organized frenzy of Baroque frescoes. Amid all this, a smart little boy (Tommy Rettig), wise beyond his years, is the eye of the storm, brewing stories of his own.—*R.B.* (Film Society of Lincoln Center; Sept. 6 and Sept. 8.)

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

Spencer Tracy interprets Jekyll as a worldly gentleman with a healthy sex drive, and Hyde as his sadistic id. Often underrated, this free and acute 1941 rendition of Robert Louis Stevenson's novella tackles Victorian hypocrisy head-on and plays like a rousing, dark operetta—despite, or perhaps because of, its outrageous Freudian hallucination scenes. It co-stars a girlish Lana Turner as Jekyll's conventional fiancée and a blooming Ingrid Bergman as the warm-blooded barmaid who tempts Jekyll and becomes Hyde's kept and tortured woman. As quick and earthy as he is smart and solid, Tracy, under Victor Fleming's direction, achieves the most balanced movie incarnation there is of Stevenson's hero-villain. (Even the morphing effects are spare and persuasive.) Tracy's Jekyll has an easy virility and his Hyde a warped self-delight and a shrewd intelligence, retaining Stevenson's description of Hyde as a man whose defects are hard to pin down. Best of all, Bergman is both ripe and touching in her erotic readiness—a prize that Hyde has to possess, then break. When he advances on this sensual innocent, the horror of the story becomes palpable.—*Michael Sragow* (MOMA; Sept. 2 and Sept. 8.)

Digging for Fire

A happy couple's submerged tensions come to the surface in Joe Swanberg's tender, wildly imaginative comic drama. Tim (Jake Johnson), a public-school teacher; Lee (Rosemarie DeWitt), a yoga instructor; and their toddler son, Jude (Jude Swanberg, the director's son), take a staycation in a luxurious house belonging to one of her clients. Scratching around on the hilly property, Tim unearths a gun and a human bone, and wants to dig further. Lee brings Jude to her mother's house and plans a night on the town with a friend (Melanie Lynskey), leaving Tim to plow through a pile of receipts and do their taxes. Instead, Tim invites some guys over, and they bring some girls, and everyone gets in on the excavation. The exuberantly crisscrossing story (co-written by Swanberg and Johnson), involving drugs, alcohol, fights, and flirtations, captures the mixed emotions of marriage and parenthood, with conflicts between love and frustration, devotion and constraint, threatening to tear apart a well-matched pair. Refreshing life by

considering death, renewing romance in the face of violence, Swanberg offers symbolic nods to the land of film noir.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

The End of the Tour

The author David Lipsky (Jesse Eisenberg) learns, to his dismay, that David Foster Wallace (Jason Segel) has died. This prompts him to unearth old tapes, recorded when he interviewed the novelist—who had recently published "Infinite Jest"—some years before. The bulk of James Ponsoldt's movie consists of a flashback to that time. Little of it is rich in drama; we solemnly follow Lipsky as he flies to Illinois, rents a car, and arrives at the novelist's home. The two of them discover a mutual taste for junk food, but their brief rapport falls well short of friendship. There is a scratchy abrasiveness (ideal for Eisenberg's demeanor) in Lipsky's envy of the other man, while Wallace's wavering attitude to the literary life—which he views both as the holiest of callings and as, really, no big deal—leaves his interlocutor frustrated. The film is mainly a two-hander, condensing to a troubling one-hander, as Segel holds the screen. He lends charm to Wallace but stops wisely short of making him easy to like. Although we learn next to nothing of the author's work, the compulsions that drove it and the gasping grabs at happiness which flickered through it are there to behold in the actor's fine performance.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 8/10 & 17/15.) (In wide release.)

Fantastic Four

There's inspired madness and authentic sweetness in the director Josh Trank's adaptation of this Marvel Comics property. Trank traces the band of heroes back to the precocious elementary-school exploits of Reed Richards, a science whiz, and Ben Grimm, a junk-yard scion. In high school, Reed (Miles Teller) and Ben (Jamie Bell) build a teleportation device that works too well, sending living creatures into extra dimensions and parallel worlds. The collegiate Reed perfects his invention in collaboration with Johnny Storm (Michael B. Jordan), Sue Storm (Kate Mara), and the envious Victor Von Doom (Toby Kebbell). Unfortunately, much screen time is wasted on a villainous bureaucrat (Tim Blake Nelson), who wants to militarize the wondrous

invention against the wishes of Reed's benefactor (Reg E. Cathey). The excess plot distracts from Trank's relaxed, warm-hearted observation of the teens at work, as well as from his furious, terrified view of science gone wrong. When the youths are transformed into superheroes with unnatural powers, their new bodies—especially the rocky horror of Ben, now *The Thing*—inaugurate new psychic dimensions along with new adventures, which Trank films with an exhilarating visual imagination.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

Grandma

Lily Tomlin shines as the cantankerous, combative, brutally frank poet Elle Reid, now fallen into literary silence after the death of her partner of thirty-eight years. Elle breaks up with a new, much younger girlfriend named Olivia (Judy Greer), but her uncreative solitude is disturbed by the arrival of her teen-age granddaughter, Sage (Julia Garner), who is pregnant and has an appointment for an abortion that very day, but no money to pay for it. Neither does Elle, who, as a result, packs Sage into her old car and goes on a local odyssey through her circle of acquaintances, past and present, in quest of the funds. The tightly constructed small-scale comic drama, written and directed by Paul Weitz, puts Elle face to face with a lifetime of bittersweet memories, involving the transgender tattoo artist Deathy (Laverne Cox) and Karl (Sam Elliott), the man whom Elle left when she came out as a lesbian. But Weitz leaches the tough situations of emotional difficulty; the sentimental drama is a superhero movie for liberals. Elle's faux crustiness gleams with her heart of gold, and the movie's heroes and villains line up as obviously as in a blockbuster.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

In a Lonely Place

Nicholas Ray's melodrama, from 1950, is one of the darkest, harshest, and most devastating love stories ever made. It's an inside-Hollywood story, starring Humphrey Bogart as Dixon Steele, a gifted screenwriter with a mean streak. Dixon meets his dream woman, Laurel Gray (Gloria Grahame), a fledgling actress, the very night that another woman he was with is found murdered, and he comes under suspicion. The clash of movie-world scandal with local politics gives the passionate affair a broad backdrop, as does Ray's fervent depiction of fragile, high-strung artists caught between love and work. Ray—who was married to Grahame at the time—endows the couple's intimate moments with a bittersweet ardor (which gives rise to a love scene in which Dixon describes how he writes love scenes). The stars are joined by a superb batch of character actors, in such roles as a sentimental agent and a Falstaffian thespian, in sequences that play like bruising chamber music, with two-person face-offs, triangular confrontations, and jousting quartets. Few movies suggest such a forthright flaying of their director's soul.—*R.B.* (Film Society of Lincoln Center; Sept. 4 and Sept. 7.)

Kings of the Road

In 1975, in West Germany's *Wild East*, along the border of the Iron Curtain, Wim Wenders filmed this American-style road movie about Bruno (Rüdiger Vogler), a shaggy film-projector repairman who lives in his truck, and Robert (Hanns Zischler), a despairing intellectual whom he picks up along his route. The desolate region is haunted by the past (the movie opens with the confessions of an ex-Nazi theatre owner) and bears the scars of war, yet Wenders coolly captures the American invasion of Bruno's life off the grid. Rock music and

Hollywood movies haunt his days and nights, and Wenders fills the film with cinephilic quotations and references. Robert, a literary man, arrives like a character from "Pierrot le Fou" and acts like a character from "L'Avventura," but he forms a duo with the easy-riding Bruno which seems closer to Laurel and Hardy. Wenders films their bewilderment in a wasteland with tender irony and sentimental optimism. In German.—*R.B.* (IFC Center; Sept. 4-10.)

The Man from U.N.C.L.E.

Another old television show is put through the remake mill. The unlucky candidate, this time, is the light and frolicsome spy drama that ran from 1964 to 1968 and starred Robert Vaughn and David McCallum. (It was clearly an elixir, too, since both men are still hard at work.) Their respective roles, of Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin, now pass to Henry Cavill and Armie Hammer, neither of whom looks a fraction as comfortable as his predecessor. Indeed, the whole production, directed by Guy Ritchie, feels tense and unrelaxed, desperately stacking up the period details—for we are still in the lap of the nineteen-sixties—while falling far short of the suavity that is required. The plot ferries our heroes from a shadowy chase in Berlin (the best thing in the film) to the gloss of Roman high society, thus turning Cold War enemies into uneasy chums. Caught between them is a young German named Gaby—played by Alicia Vikander, who is laden with dresses and gewgaws yet denuded of any chance to shine. With Hugh Grant, who dons a pair of shades not to fend off the sun but as if hoping to sidle through the whole thing incognito.—*A.L.* (Reviewed in our issue of 8/24/15.) (In wide release.)

The Mend

This grinding, pathos-laden melodrama, directed by John Magary, turns cruel and capricious behavior among aging and troubled bohemians into a springboard for showy displays of actorly chops. Josh Lucas stars as Mat, a bearded, big-time lover endowed with massive irresponsibility. Thrown out by his girlfriend, Andrea (Lucy Owen), he crashes a party at the apartment of his brother, Alan (Stephen Plunkett), and Alan's girlfriend, Farrah (Mickey Sumner). When Farrah and Alan leave the next morning, Mat stays and invites Andrea and her young son, Ronnie (Cory Nichols), to move in with him there; when Alan returns, a bruising reunion results. Broken love joins with broken glass as festering resentments and romantic wrangles yield yawns of pain and desire. Magary's ambition overwhelms his insight; he dourly delights in the mess that the characters make of their lives but lends them little fantasy or psychological resonance. Despite the willful worldliness of the high-stakes emotional games, the movie's downbeat street poetry devolves into moody clichés. With Austin Pendleton, as the brothers' flamboyantly life-worn uncle.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

Mission: Impossible—Rogue Nation

A franchise that was starting to sag has recovered its buoyancy and zip, thanks to the writer and director Christopher McQuarrie. As a plotter, he is finicky to a fault, and this tale is a tangle of uncertain loyalties; as a filmmaker, he adheres firmly to the primacy of the set piece and the preternatural stamina of his star. Notable sights include Tom Cruise clinging to the outside of an airplane, Tom Cruise holding his breath for an underwater theft, and Tom Cruise, devoid of both fear and helmet, gunning his motorbike around hairpin bends. His character, Ethan Hunt, is pursuing Ilsa Faust (Rebecca Ferguson), deter-

mined to find out if she is with him or against him. Ferguson, amused and unbreakable, is more than a match for Cruise, and a fine addition to the ranks; she outpaces Ving Rhames, Simon Pegg, and Jeremy Renner, all of whom return as Ethan's pals. The rogues of the title refers to the Syndicate, a near-mythical outfit headed by Solomon Lane (Sean Harris) and dedicated to global disarray. But Ethan's own team, too, is forced to go rogue, disowned by the C.I.A. The movie subsides toward the end, but not before delivering its payload of thrills. With Alec Baldwin.—*A.L.* (8/10 & 17/15) (In wide release.)

Mistress America

The new Noah Baumbach movie—arriving hot on the heels of the last one, "While We're Young"—is about Tracy (Lola Kirke), a freshman at Barnard, and her fragile friendship with Brooke (Greta Gerwig), twelve years her senior. They are linked though not yet related, since Tracy's mother is betrothed to Brooke's father. Brooke does a heap of things, none of which endures; she runs an exercise class, she plans to open a restaurant, and her eagerness both captivates and vexes the younger woman, who seems wiser and more guarded, and who doesn't scruple to write a story based on the figure of Brooke, much to the latter's distress. Baumbach, as a student of screwball, knows how the lunges of action, in pursuit of love or money, can veer toward a kind of madness, yet he also displays great coolness and care throughout the second half of the film, as he stages an elaborate set piece inside a fancy house in Connecticut—introducing one fresh character after another, without cluttering the frame or letting the energy drop. That is why some of the sharpest contributions come from supporting players: Michael Chernus, as Brooke's former beau, now chunky and rich; Matthew Shear, as a classmate of Tracy's; and Jasmine Cephas Jones, as his seething girlfriend.—*A.L.* (8/24/15) (In limited release.)

Once Upon a Time in America

Just about all the incidents in this three-hour-and-forty-seven-minute film echo scenes in Hollywood gangster movies, but the director, Sergio Leone, inflates them, slows them down, and gives them a dreamy obsessiveness. He transmutes the Lower East Side settings of those gangster movies to give the genre a richer, more luxuriant visual texture. His wide-screen view of a group of Jewish kids who start with petty crime and move into big-time racketeering is set in 1921, 1933, and 1968, but not in that order. His theme is the betrayal of the immigrants' dream of America, and the story begins and ends in an opium den where Noodles (Robert De Niro) puffs on a pipe while episodes of his life of killings and rapes and massacres drift by and a telephone rings somewhere in the past. This epic is a compendium of kitsch, but it's kitsch aestheticized by someone who loves it and sees it as the poetry of the masses. It isn't just the echoing moments that keep you absorbed—it's the reverberant dreamland settings and Leone's majestic, billowing sense of film movement. With Jennifer Connelly, who's marvellously vivid as the young Deborah; Darlante Fluegel, as the beautiful streamlined blonde Eve; and Tuesday Weld, who brings a gleam of perversity to the role of a moll. From 1984.—*Pauline Kael* (Museum of the Moving Image; Sept. 4 and Sept. 6.)

Ricki and the Flash

The title of the new Jonathan Demme film, written by Diablo Cody, refers to the house band at a bar in Tarzana, California. No longer in the flush of youth, its members are popular

with the patrons but blessed with no wider fame. The lead singer is Ricki (Meryl Streep), whose real name is Linda. Years ago, she left her husband, Pete (Kevin Kline), and their young children for rock's sake; now, learning that her daughter Julie—played by Streep's own daughter Mamie Gummer—has hit a rough patch, Linda flies to Indianapolis, where Pete and his wife, Maureen (Audra McDonald), lead a spotless life in a gated community. The film is burdened with some obvious setups—such as the rangy existence of the performing artist versus the constraints of the rich stiff—and yet, against the odds, Demme delivers his most affable and dexterous work in a long while. We know that Linda will warm up the household and that music will exert its healing powers, but Demme is unrivalled at filming bands at play and at noticing the folks who listen and dance along, and Streep's part is worthy of her formidable gifts. Her singing has an edge of urgency to it and a secure hold on the emotional form of the movie. The happy ending, for once, feels thoroughly earned. With Rick Springfield.—*A.L.* (In limited release.)

7 Chinese Brothers

The quiet, dour whimsy of the director Bob Byington's world meshes almost too perfectly with the fanciful performance of Jason Schwartzman, who shines in this comedy about money and love. Schwartzman plays Larry, who's stuck in a round of low-paying jobs that he contemptuously endures. Fired from one, he gets another, at an automotive shop that's graced with a boss, Lupe

(Eleanore Pienta), whom he not so secretly loves, and burdened with a bullying colleague, Jimmy (Jimmy Gonzales). Larry spends most of his free time at home with his stolid pug, Arrow (Schwartzman's own dog), and a little of it at a nursing home, visiting his grandmother (Olympia Dukakis), who dispenses bitter wisdom and tough love, and Major Norwood (Tunde Adebimpe), an orderly who is his friend, pill dealer, and rival in love. Schwartzman brings sardonic swing to Larry's anomie but, over all, this feast of performance is served in very small dishes. Byington's spare visual and narrative style, though authentic, sacrifices the story's deeper echoes, and much of the sweetness is artificial. But the sharpest moments cast mundane struggles in a nearly spiritual light.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

Straight Outta Compton

This bio-pic, about the rise, breakup, and legacy of the Los Angeles hip-hop group N.W.A., gets beyond the glamorous surface of fame to reveal the machinations that brought the ensemble together in the nineteen-eighties, and soon drove it apart. The movie also highlights, with justified outrage, the abuses inflicted by the police against blacks—and, in particular, on N.W.A.'s members—which gave rise to the famous song "Fuck tha Police." The director, F. Gary Gray, emphasizes the hit's importance by filming a contested performance of it in Detroit as a bravura showpiece. The remarkable cast—headed by Corey Hawkins, as the musical mastermind Dr. Dre; O'Shea Jackson, Jr., as the ingenious lyricist Ice Cube (who

is also Jackson's real-life father); and Jason Mitchell, as Eazy-E, the entrepreneurial drug dealer who financed the group's record label and starred on its first hit—maintains an energized, conversational rapidity. But the personal lives of the musicians are mere backdrop. The core of the story is business, the object is power, and the quirks of desire and twists of the unconscious are given no place in the struggle—which the movie sharply carries ahead to the present day.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

Triple Agent

Eric Rohmer constructed this drama, from 2004, on his lifelong theme—the danger of yielding to false love while awaiting a true one—and blended it with his rarely expressed political ideas. The action (loosely based on real events) unfolds in the Russian-émigré milieu of Paris in the nineteen-thirties: the elegant Fyodor Voronin (Serge Renko), a former Russian general in exile, spreads rumors and foments intrigue in diplomatic and journalistic circles in order to create an illusion of power which he hopes to make a reality. Among the factions competing for his fealty are the Communists, the Nazis, and his own wife, Arsinoé (Katerina Didaskalou), a Greek artist whose forthright political morality makes her an unreliable partner in his Machiavellian games. Rohmer keeps the titanic and bloody struggle of competing forces under the tight bonds of diplomatic and domestic decorum, but just beneath the surfaces of his characters' formality—and of his images' taut precision—lurk the

political depravities and intimate furies that bring the couple's story, and Europe's, to the same unbearable conclusion. In French, Russian, and German.—*R.B.* (BAM Cinématek; Sept. 2.)

Voyage to Italy

One of the most quietly revolutionary works in the history of cinema, Roberto Rossellini's third feature starring Ingrid Bergman (his wife at the time), from 1953, turns romantic melodrama into intellectual adventure. An English couple—Alex (George Sanders), a cynical, supercilious businessman, and his sensitive, cultured wife, Katherine (Bergman)—arrive in Naples to deal with an inheritance. As they travel alone together for the first time in eight years of childless marriage, their repressed estrangement bursts into open conflict. Filming on location, Rossellini devotes as much attention to the Italian settings and their cultural treasures as to the characters wandering among them; at Pompeii, the entwined bodies of lovers blasted by Vesuvius put an existential spin on Katherine's misery. Rossellini realizes his political agenda—regarding bourgeois sophisticates whose sensibility is stunted by comfort—with a vision of redemption through aesthetic passion and populist experience. Like the characters themselves, the stars get out of the Bentley and into the streets. From Rossellini's example, the young French New Wave critics learned to fuse studio style with documentary methods, to make high-relief drama on a low budget.—*R.B.* (MOMA; Sept. 8.)

ABOVE & BEYOND

Dollypalooza

Bevin Branlandingham—a performance artist by night and a lawyer by day—founded this event last year, after a trip to Dollywood. Wanting to create a New York tribute to the rhinestoned country singer, she brought in burlesque and drag acts as well as other performers. There will be appearances by Sequinette, Merrie Cherry, and Lady Quesa Dilla, and the likely showstopper is a set from Doll Parts, a local Parton cover band. There's also a silent auction in support of Imagination Library, which supplies books to children in need, featuring vintage Dolly memorabilia, inspired fan art, and a trip to Dollywood. (Littlefield, 622 Degraw St., Brooklyn. dollypalooza.com. Sept. 4 at 8.)

Paper Jam Small Press Festival

This biannual gathering is a window into the world of zines, chapbooks, political pamphlets, art objects, and comics. Compared with most comic-book festivals, which take a more-is-more approach by cramming hundreds of artists into sprawling spaces, Paper Jam creates an accessible atmosphere with a diverse selection of lesser-heard voices. Because exhibitors are not repeated fair to fair, each iteration is an opportunity to discover new works and meet up-and-coming artists, writers, and publishers. (Silent Barn, 603 Bushwick Ave., Brooklyn. paperjamfest.tumblr.com. Sept. 5, from noon to 6:30.)

NYC Unicycle Festival

Long associated with circus life and clowning, the wobbly transport is also

a visually offbeat and goofy pastime to many people, as well as a quirky and serious sport to a select few. This four-day-long gathering is a free, all-ages, and all-levels affair hosted by the Bindlestiff Family Circus, an internationally known performance troupe. It begins on Sept. 3, with a group ride from Battery Park to Central Park. The following day, there's

a thirteen-mile bridge-crossing ride from City Hall to the far reaches of Brooklyn, and a unicycle-themed stage show at Coney Island. Sept. 5-6, on Governors Island, unicycle basketball, unicycle hockey, and unicycle sumo is on tap, and there will be workshops and a learn-to-ride area for those just beginning their one-wheeled journeys. (nycunifest.com.)

READINGS AND TALKS

The Powerhouse Arena

Salman Rushdie celebrates the publication of his new novel, "Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights." (37 Main St., Brooklyn. 718-666-3049. Reservations suggested, via RSVP@powerhousearena.com. Sept. 8 at 7:30.)

Pen Parentis Literary Salon

Pen Parentis, an organization devoted to supporting writers who are also parents, kicks off its fourteenth season with a night of crime stories by Tim O'Mara, Ed Lin, and Jack Miller. Wine will be served. (Andaz Wall Street, 75 Wall St. penparentis.org. Sept. 8 at 7.)

NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors lead complicated lives; it's advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.

Jenny Hval

This Norwegian chanteuse and provocateur fuses enigmatic aphorisms about gender politics and sexuality with catchy, Kate Bush-tinged electro-pop. What stands out on her intriguing new record, "Apocalypse, Girl," is not the lyrical content but Hval's voice, an ethereal instrument capable of singeing the heart. Joining her will be her countryman **Havard Volden**, on electronics, and the American filmmaker **Zia Anger**, who will project accompanying images. The like-minded Seattle-based singer **Briana Marela**, who delivers innocent lyrics with a mellifluous touch, will also be on hand. (Rough Trade NYC, 64 N. 9th St., Brooklyn. roughtradenyc.com. Sept. 6.)

Mimicking Birds

The Portland, Oregon-based singer-songwriter Nate Lacy started this act as a home-recording project, and, though it grew into a full-fledged group, its 2009 eponymous debut album, co-produced by Modest Mouse's Isaac Brock and Clay Jones, retained the intimacy and introspective nature of a one-man band, with intricate folk songs that feel handcrafted. The Mimicking Birds' second album, "Eons," released in 2014, brings a lush, more expansive sound, and a cool breeze of pop blows through now and again. (Rough Trade NYC, 64 N. 9th St., Brooklyn. roughtradenyc.com. Sept. 8.)

Thee Oh Sees

In the past two decades, John Dwyer, the front man of this ever-evolving rock group, has become something of an indie legend, particularly in San Francisco, where he lived and worked until a recent move to L.A. He delivers consistently interesting and skilled work, and the band's latest album, "Mutilator Defeated at Last," is no exception. Its fuzz-laden, guitar-crazed psych-rock comes on strong and doesn't slow down. There's enough adrenaline in these songs to keep you bouncing for days. (Sept. 8: Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St. 212-533-2111. Sept. 9-11: Warsaw, 261 Driggs Ave., Brooklyn. 718-387-0505.)

Billy Bob Thornton and the Boxmasters

Thornton is most famous for his film and television performances, but he's also a dedicated singer-songwriter, and one of the few actor-musicians who succeeds in both fields. For nearly a decade, he's fronted the Boxmasters and turned out rootsy Americana and sixties-style rockabilly. The ensemble, which also includes J. D. Andrew, Teddy Andreadis, and Brad Davis, released its fourth album, "Somewhere Down the Road,"

this spring. On previous LPs, the band served up plenty of covers, but this two-disk set is full of original jangly pop and country rock. (Gramercy Theatre, 127 E. 23rd St. livenation.com. Sept. 8.)

Widowspeak

The slow, mellow tunes of this indie-rock duo are perfect for a late-summer boat ride, which is how you can catch them on Sept. 3, when Rocks Off Concert Cruises host the pair as they celebrate the release of their fourth album, "All Yours." Robert Earl Thomas's reverb-heavy electric-guitar parts wind their way beneath Molly Hamilton's whispery vocals. The pair lean toward the languid but occasionally pick up the pace, as on "Dead Love (So Still)," though the shift won't make anyone spill his drink. With **John Andrews & the Yawns**. (Departing from the Skyport Marina, E. 23rd St. at F.D.R. Drive. rocksoff.com.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Benny Golson

The reputation of the hard-bop hero Golson could rest solely on his indelible compositions, including "Killer Joe," "I Remember Clifford," and "Stablemates," but he also happens to be one of the finest mainstream tenor saxophonists still regularly performing. His up-tempo romps are as stirring as his ballads are heartrending—see him, and have something to tell the grandchildren about. (Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232. Sept. 3-6.)

Jerry González and the Fort Apache Band

Contemporary small-group jazz that makes use of Latin sources may be part and parcel of today's musical environment (see Miguel Zenón, below), but when the *conguero* and trumpeter González melded modal hard bop and Caribbean musical idioms, in the late seventies, it was a revelation. Though González spends a lot of time in Europe, his enduring Fort Apache Band, featuring the pianist **Larry Willis** and Jerry's brother, the bassist **Andy González**, lives on. (Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St. 212-475-8592. Sept. 1-6.)

"Lessons from Our Masters"

Now is a good time to pay attention to iconic jazz veterans still playing at the top of their game. This mini-celebration features three drum luminaries helming their own bands: **Louis Hayes** (on Sept. 4), **Jimmy Cobb** (on Sept. 5), and **Al (Tootie) Heath** (on Sept. 6). **Kenny Barron**, the dean of mainstream piano, takes the stage on Sept. 7. (Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola, Broadway at 60th St. 212-258-9595.)

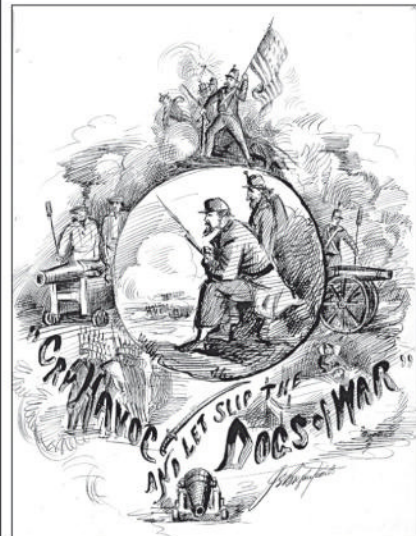
Johnny O'Neal Trio

A onetime player of promise who popped on and off the jazz scene for years, the pianist and singer O'Neal has returned, phoenix-like, to draw devoted listeners to evenings of keyboard wizardry and good-time vocalizing. There aren't many who do what he does, or who do it as well. (Smalls, 183 W. 10th St. 212-252-5091. Sept. 6.)

Miguel Zenón 4Tet

The Puerto Rican-American experience is at the core of the saxophonist Zenón's most recent album, "Identities Are Changeable," from 2014, a project that intertwines Afro-Latin sources, post-bop jazz, and audio interviews. Although Zenón, a 2008 MacArthur Fellow, employed a large ensemble with mastery for that release, his compact unit, featuring the pianist **Luis Perdomo**, the bassist **Hans Glawischnig**, and the drummer **Henry Cole**, still packs a punch. (Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037. Sept. 1-6.)

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TABLES FOR TWO

FARO

436 Jefferson St., Brooklyn (718-381-8201)

MILLING ONE'S OWN GRAIN: EVEN IF these words evoke nothing but a tableau from a dimly remembered Thomas Hardy novel, they at least seem to promise plenty of carbs. And so it is at Faro, a new Italian restaurant in Bushwick, where the kitchen makes its flour from grains grown upstate and then turns it into inventive pasta shapes. There's also a wood-burning oven that does wonders with asparagus and octopus, animal-welfare-approved meat, and a minimalist dining room so cool and spacious that it looks like an imagined Los Angeles.

You can't eat the Zeitgeist, though, and the trendy premise of Faro gives way to an oddly old-fashioned meal. This is a polite way of saying that the food is very heavy. The Roman gnocchi, especially when served at the height of summer, will send even the heartiest of eaters into a fugue state as she plows through two huge planks of semolina. They seem the size of Cabbage Patch Kids, and rather than swim in their pool of thick white sauce they sit very still, mollified by a blanket of kale, egg, and Parmesan. Still, polishing off a chewy starch surrounded by cream isn't exactly hard work. After mining the local-grain porridge for chanterelles, it disappears as well, along with the squid-ink calamaretti, crowned with a wreath of lobster and doused in a cilantro-coconut curry. Lemon's for wimps, as Caligula probably said.

That calamaretti, like much of what's on offer, looks spectacular: black, red, and green, on a handmade plate from a local studio that designs quirky ceramics for Manhattan tasting menus. You half expect hashtags to form in the steam above it (#NoFilter, #EatLocal). Faro should, by rights, be annoying, precious, and easily dismissed, but there are so many pleasing details, like pickled mustard seeds in the beef tartare, and chèvre cream beneath the fire-roasted beets—not to mention all those idiosyncratic plates scraped clean. Dessert's a moist, dense cake, like polenta, made with corn ground in house. Whiskey sours are neither local nor new, but they're good, too.

—Amelia Lester

Open daily for dinner. Pastas \$13-\$20.



FOOD & DRINK

BAR TAB SISTERS

900 Fulton St., Brooklyn (347-763-2537)

For a decade, Atchudta Barkr and her son, Ali, ran a cavernous hardware store in Clinton Hill. Photographs of Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and the astronaut Mae Jemison hung on the walls. Soul tunes played while local tinkers wandered the humid aisles, eyeing rentable drills and rabbits' feet. When the building's owner hiked the rent on Sister's Community Hardware, the shop moved to Atlantic Avenue. It became Hardware 2.0, and its former home became Sisters, where, thirty feet above a long, white, curving bar, an enormous skylight lets you know when it's time to order a stimulant (doors open at 7 A.M.) or a drink (they serve absinthe straight). Décor includes peeling oversized mirrors and Carrara-marble tiles; house cocktails include the mescal-based Hidden Hand (tastes like smoked banana) and, even better, the miraculous rye-based Cool Leatherette (secret ingredient: balsamic vinegar). On a recent Saturday, a woman with bangs sipped her white wine (Grüner Veltliner is on tap) and said, "There's this whole blogosphere of girls always in bed, and it's like, 'Get out of bed!'" A short dinner menu offers locavore fare recognizable from the owner Damon Gorton's first venture, Flatbush Farm, in Park Slope. (Try the silky fluke crudo with pickled watermelon.) In the woodsier back room is a second bar. A woman wearing big glasses spins soul records in a walnut d.j. booth. A bearded Canadian muses, "I wonder what was here before."

—Carolyn Kormann

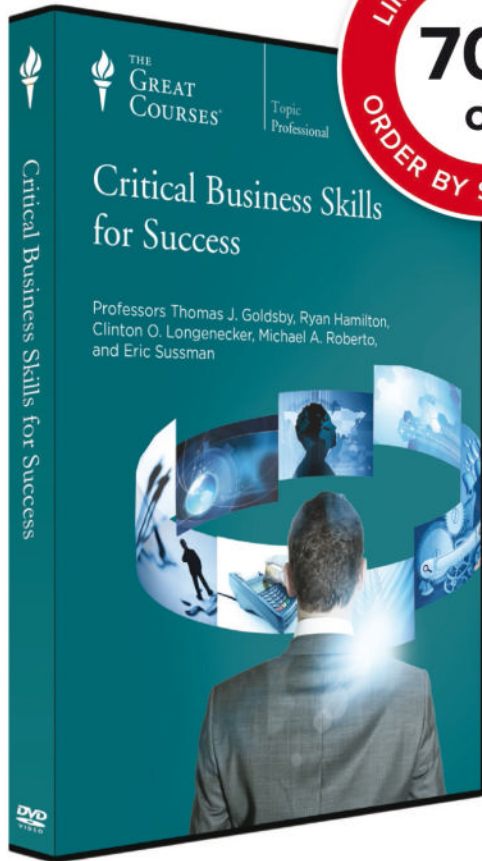


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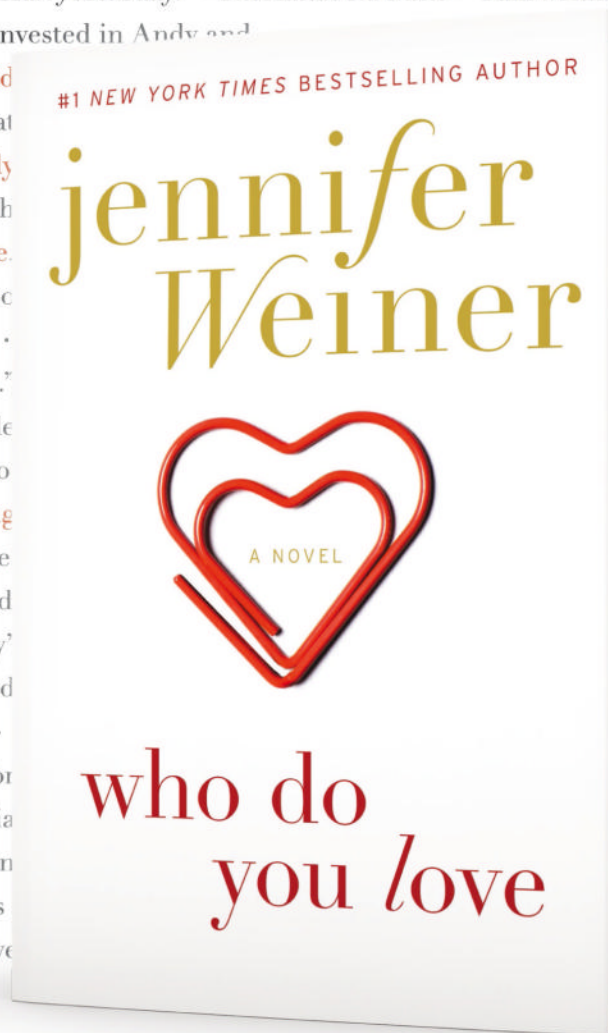
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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT THE POPULISTS

Thomas E. Watson, the populist from Georgia who had a long and increasingly demagogic career in American politics, wrote in 1910:

The scum of creation has been dumped on us. Some of our principal cities are more foreign than American. The most dangerous and corrupting hordes of the Old World have invaded us. The vice and crime which they have planted in our midst are sickening and terrifying. What brought these Goths and Vandals to our shores? The manufacturers are mainly to blame. They wanted cheap labor; and they didn't care a curse how much harm to our future might be the consequence of their heartless policy.

The objects of Watson's bile were the Italians, Poles, Jews, and other European immigrants then pouring into the United States. A century later, in the populist summer of 2015, some of their great-grandchildren have been cheering Donald Trump as he denounces the latest generation of immigrants, in remarkably similar terms.

American populism has a complicated history, and Watson embodied its paradoxes. He ended his career, as a U.S. senator, whipping up white-Protestant enmity against blacks, Catholics, and Jews; but at the outset, as a leader of the People's Party in the eighteen-nineties, he urged poor whites and blacks to join together and upend an economic order dominated by "the money power." Watson wound up as Trump, but he started out closer to Bernie Sanders, and his hostility to the one per cent of the Gilded Age would do Sanders proud. Some of Watson's early ideas—rural free delivery of mail, for example—eventually came to fruition.

That's the volatile nature of populism: it can ignite reform or reaction, idealism or scapegoating. It flourishes in periods like Watson's, and like our own, when large numbers of citizens who see themselves as the backbone of America ("producers" then, "the middle class" now) feel that the game is rigged against them. They aren't the wretched of the earth—Sanders attracts educated urbanites, Trump small-town businessmen. They're people with a sense of violated ownership, holding a vision of an earlier, better America that has come under threat.



Populism is a stance and a rhetoric more than an ideology or a set of positions. It speaks of a battle of good against evil, demanding simple answers to difficult problems. (Trump: "Trade? We're gonna fix it. Health care? We're gonna fix it.") It's suspicious of the normal bargaining and compromise that constitute democratic governance. (On the stump, Sanders seldom touts his bipartisan successes as chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee.) Populism can have a conspiratorial and apocalyptic bent—the belief that the country, or at least its decent majority, is facing imminent ruin at the hands of a particular group of malefactors (Mexicans, billionaires, Jews, politicians).

Above all, populism seeks and thrills to the authentic voice of the people. Followers of both Sanders and Trump prize their man's willingness to articulate what ordinary people feel but politicians fear to say. "I might not agree with Bernie on everything, but I believe he has values, and he's going to stick to those and he will not lie to us," a supporter named Liam Dewey told ABC News. The fact that Sanders has a tendency to drone on like a speaker at the Socialist Scholars Conference circa 1986—one who happens to have an audience of twenty-seven thousand—only enhances his bona fides. He's the improbable beneficiary of a deeply disenchanted public. As for Trump, his rhetoric is so crude and from-the-hip that his fans are continually reassured about its authenticity.

Responding to the same political moment, the phenomena of Trump and Sanders bear a superficial resemblance. Both men have no history of party loyalty, which only enhances their street cred—their authority comes from a direct bond with their supporters, free of institutional interference. They both rail against foreign-trade deals, decry the unofficial jobless rate, and express disdain for the political class and the dirty money it raises to stay in office. Last week, Trump even denounced the carried-interest tax loophole for investment managers (a favorite target of the

left). “These hedge-fund guys are getting away with murder,” he told CBS News. “These are guys that shift paper around and they get lucky.”

But the difference between Sanders and Trump is large, and more fundamental than the difference between their personal styles or their places on the political spectrum. Sanders, who has spent most of his career as an outsider on the inside, believes ardently in politics. He views the political arena as a battle of opposing classes (even more than Elizabeth Warren, he really does seem to hate the rich), but believes that their conflicts can be managed through elections and legislation. What Sanders calls a political revolution is closer to a campaign of far-reaching but plausible reforms. He proposes a financial-transactions tax and the breakup of the biggest banks; he doesn’t demand the nationalization of banking. His views might appall Wall Street, but they exist within the realm of rational persuasion.

Trump (whatever he really believes) is playing the game of anti-politics. From George Wallace to Ross Perot, anti-politics has been a constant in recent American history; candidates as diverse as Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, and Barack Obama have won the Presidency by seeming to reject or rise above the unlovely business of politics and government. Trump takes it to a demagogic extreme. There’s no dirtier word in

the lexicon of his stump speech than “politician.” He incites his audiences’ contempt for the very notion of solving problems through political means. China, the Islamic State, immigrants, unemployment, Wall Street: just let him handle it—he’ll build the wall, deport the eleven million, rewrite the Fourteenth Amendment, create the jobs, kill the terrorists. He offers no idea beyond himself, the leader who can reverse the country’s decline by sheer force of personality. Speaking in Mobile, Alabama, recently, he paused to wonder whether representative government was even necessary. After ticking off his leads in various polls, Trump asked the crowd of thirty thousand, “Why do we need an election? We don’t need an election.” When Trump narrows his eyes and juts out his lip, he’s a showman pretending to be a strongman.

There aren’t many examples of the populist strongman in American history (Huey Long comes to mind). Our attachment to democracy, if not to its institutions and professionals, has been too firm for that. There are more examples of populists who, while failing to win national election, extend the parameters of discourse and ultimately bring about important reforms (think of Robert M. La Follette, Sr.). Though populists seldom get elected President, they can—like the young Tom Watson and the old—cleanse or foul the political air.

—George Packer

UP LIFE’S LADDER UNDERAGE



Zoe Markowitz is sixteen and in the eleventh grade at Eleanor Roosevelt High, on East Seventy-sixth Street. “My dad is a lawyer, and my mom is a banker at JP Morgan,” she said one morning, while strolling up Madison Avenue. “They, like, don’t know who I am or where I came from.” Markowitz has long brown hair and wore bright-pink lipstick and big Kate Spade sunglasses. She has taken a fashion-design class at Parsons and describes her style as “elegant punk.” She used to do Model U.N., and she’d like to get back into it. In the meantime, she’s serving as the youngest member ever on Community Board 8.

“I applied when I was fifteen, which you’re not really supposed to do,” Markowitz said. “My principal sent an e-mail basically explaining that teen-agers could now apply because of new legislation. There was this meeting at City Hall.” She had never been, but it sounded cool. “It was kind of hard to get around down there—I don’t know how the streets are

organized.” New York City community boards, of which there are fifty-nine, serve as advisory bodies to the City Council, the Mayor’s Office, and other agencies; each board comprises fifty members, who are appointed by their borough president. Markowitz, who is used to applying for things—like junior high (East Side Middle) and internships (with Senator Charles Schumer)—faced a multi-round screening process. After submitting a formal application, she had a group interview, in which she was asked to participate in a team challenge: “We had to pretend we were in the wilderness and we had items that we had to list in terms of importance.” Then she had a one-on-one with her City Council representative, Ben Kallos. “We did have a frank conversation about school-work and how hard this would be,” Kallos said later. “She could not bring her homework to meetings.” Markowitz got the job. “My mom was like, ‘They really let you vote?’ And I was like, ‘Yeah!’”

Crossing Seventy-third, Markowitz explained that her issues are education and affordable housing. Although Times Square is outside her board’s jurisdiction, she has followed the controversy over the body-painted topless women who pose for photos with tourists there. “I like the whole free-the-nipple move-

ment,” she said. “I’m a feminist, and there’s the idea that a nipple is on both genders. I personally wouldn’t walk around topless in Times Square, though.”

She’s still getting used to being on the board. “The monthly meetings are from six-thirty to nine, so when you have school it is long,” she said. “At the first meeting, I was so confused. They say ‘motion to vote on’ and then they give, like, a number. I had no idea what they were voting on.”

Her district—which extends from Fifty-ninth Street up to Ninety-sixth Street on the East Side, plus Roosevelt Island—has a lot of historic buildings. “If people want to make a change to any of those buildings, they have to go past the board,” she said. Members also weigh in on matters before the State Legislature, like whether to legalize marijuana. “I think it should be legalized,” Markowitz said. “It’s crazy—I know a boy who went to jail for a few days because of weed.” A regular item on the agenda is liquor licenses. “Sometimes people say, ‘This bar serves underage kids!’ And I’m like—” Markowitz smiled and shrugged. She is too young to buy a drink, but, she said, “I do get to decide who gets a liquor license.”

Her classmates for the most part are not into politics. “Everyone is obsessed with clothes,” she said. “And Kanye

West.” Several other teen-agers have joined community boards; they compare notes in a Facebook group. She has befriended a septuagenarian CB8 member named Dave.

Markowitz’s dream job is Secretary of State. “But a lot of people are mad at John Kerry right now about the Iran nuclear deal, so, I mean, I don’t know if I want to be hated so much,” she said. She likes Bill de Blasio well enough. “A lot of kids are like, ‘Oh, no snow day!’” She rolled her eyes.

This summer, during her internship in Chuck Schumer’s Manhattan office, Markowitz did casework, mostly, which meant answering the phone and logging “concerns.” She was in the room recently when the Senator gave a press conference with Amy Schumer, who is his cousin, on expanding gun control. Markowitz, who founded Students for Sensible Gun Laws at school, was thrilled. “I’ve seen all of her sketches,” she said, of the comedian. Had she seen “Trainwreck”? She sighed. “No! It’s rated R.”

—*Betsy Morais*

DEPT. OF FATHOMS PIECES OF EIGHT



The sparkle of clear water on white sand in the Florida Keys; and somewhere, remote and hidden within that sparkle, an even more thrilling sparkle: gold! As a boy, this amateur treasure hunter (unsuccessful, now retired) used to dream about the lost treasures of the Keys. Often he visited Mel Fisher’s Treasure Salvors museum, in Key West, when the amateur’s grandmother lived nearby. Mel Fisher was the greatest treasure hunter of all time. In that island city of long shots, no shot as long as Fisher’s ever came in so spectacularly. In 1985, after sixteen and a half years of searching, Fisher’s crew found the wreck of the Spanish treasure galleon *Nuestra Señora de Atocha*, and the discovery rocked Key West to its white coral foundations. No treasure ship as rich had ever been found.

The *Atocha* went down off the Marquesas in a hurricane on September 6,

1622. On a hot evening in August, 2015, more than a hundred and twenty-five items from the cargo of the *Atocha* and other Mel Fisher finds were put up for auction by Guernsey’s Auction House at a gallery on Madison Avenue—a “don’t miss” event, from the amateur’s point of view. He arrived early. In a second-floor room with maps and watercolors on the walls, the treasures were radiating light from tall, shelved display cases. Beside them, like a best friend, stood a tall security guard. In the corner, wearing a lavalier microphone, Taffi Fisher-Abt, Mel Fisher’s daughter, said to a camera-toting interviewer, “My father always told me, ‘These treasures used to belong to somebody, and we are their custodians now, and someday they’ll belong to someone else. Then those people will be gone, too, but the treasures will remain. People disappear, but gold shines forever.’”

In the adjoining room, Joanne Grant, an auctioneer with dark hair, dark-rimmed glasses, and bright-red lipstick, began the auction with the silver coins, including the “pieces of eight.” The amateur remembered a long-ago time when “pieces of eight” had been for him a term of untrammelled romance. This evening, a piece of eight could be got for two hundred and fifty dollars, or for forty-two hundred and fifty dollars, or for something in between. “Now you need to be at four thousand five hundred dollars,” the auctioneer gently advised a fal-

tering bidder, who blinked and then kept silent. A long gold chain, a massive emerald, a gold chalice of unbelievable loveliness and delicacy, a reliquary pendant that had once held a devotional painting, long worn away by the sea, except for the gilt halo—all this and more went to a young man who pushed his sunglasses back on his head and bid hundreds of thousands while also talking on a cell phone. “Sold to the telephone,” the auctioneer said, over and over.

Fisher, who died in 1998, sometimes used to lead tours of his museum himself. He was a big, affable man with pale-blue eyes. The terrible pain concentrated in the treasure from its cruel beginnings had echoes in his own life. In 1975, Fisher’s son Dirk, his daughter-in-law Angel, and a hired diver drowned when the anchored salvage boat aboard which they were sleeping capsized late at night, because of a faulty ballast system. Fisher’s eyes often seemed to gleam with reflected gold and wince with unspoken pain. At the end of the museum tour, he sometimes took out the bosun’s whistle recovered from the *Atocha* and blew a long, high-pitched, eerie call on it. He said that, along with the howling of the wind and the waves, the whistle would have been among the last sounds the people on the *Atocha* heard.

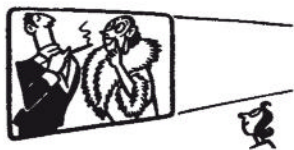
Taffi Fisher-Abt is the kind of non-New Yorker who smiles at strangers and has a friendly word for everybody. After



the auction, the amateur asked her if the Mel Fisher Maritime Museum, as it's now called, still had the bosun's whistle. She said it is in the collection of a Delaware college; a big supporter of her dad's donated it. The amateur asked if she felt satisfied with the auction's results. "Pretty much," she said. "Some things did better than I expected, some worse. Mostly I'm glad that we raised some money for our Michael Abt Jr. Have a Heart Foundation. In 2006, our twelve-year-old son, Michael, died at school during gym class from S.C.A.—sudden cardiac arrest. If the school had had a defibrillator he could've been saved. Our goal is to raise enough money to provide defibrillators and train teachers how to use them in every school nationwide. A few prices in the auction surprised me, but at least everything was bid on, and I'm glad of that, because now I won't have to carry any of this stuff back to Florida."

—Ian Frazier

WATTAGE DEPT. HOLLYWOOD SUNSET



"You are seeing me at my absolute fucking worst," Monica Lewis said cheerfully. The ninety-three-year-old entertainer had taken a fall a few days earlier in her apartment at the Motion Picture & Television Fund retirement home, near Los Angeles. It fractured her right hip and badly bruised her face. "I'm so surefooted—I'm a dancer, I've done pratfalls, all kind of stunts—and I trip over my own rug!"

She glared at the rug, then laughed. The pink caftan she wore set off her nail polish, a shade of fuchsia called Hollywood Sunset, and her smile was wide. Her publicity photos as a singer and actress always had a lot of wattage. "They used to joke about Nanette Fabray that when she opened the refrigerator door and the light came on she'd say"—Lewis threw her arms out—"Well, hello! That was me with my smile—I had *dimples*. Now they're railroad tracks. I don't put on mascara anymore, because it takes too long to dig it out."

Lewis was discovered by Benny Goodman, hosted a "Monica Makes Music" radio show, toured Korea with Danny Kaye, and introduced Ed Sullivan to her brother, who pitched him the idea that became television's longest-running variety show. She also sang the indelible Chiquita Banana commercials ("I'm Chiquita Banana and I've come to say / Bananas have to ripen in a certain way"). Blithely acknowledging that that way—"Never put bananas / In the re-frig-er-ator"—had only an arguable basis in biology, she picked up a Chiquita Banana doll and kissed it. "She's so cute—she sleeps on my bed," she said. "It's one of the most-played jingles ever, you know."

Lewis's popular Facebook page is a scrapbook of Hollywood's golden era: photos of her singing with Frank Sinatra and dancing with Vic Damone and drinking with Farley Granger and Shelley Winters. Online she seems ageless, perennially Miss Sweater Girl of New York. The studio's platinum dyes and "dehydration shots" helped, certainly, but in those days, she said, "We had costuming, beauty, *glamour*. You took an airplane and you dressed up—gloves and hats and colorful slacks—and there'd be a bevy of guys from the *Daily News* photographing me when I arrived. It was all kind of tasty and beautiful."

She dated Herman Wouk, Sidney Sheldon, Stan Kenton, Ralph Kiner, and Kirk Douglas, and turned down a marriage proposal from Ronald Reagan. Then, in 1955, she started seeing a rugged studio executive named Jennings Lang. "I was a swinging girl, but then I met Jennings, and he was a *titan*," she said. "We had a fantastically successful marriage for forty years, which shocked everybody."

In his own swinging days, Lang had a notorious confrontation with the producer Walter Wanger, who was married to Joan Bennett. "Walter was a lunatic," Lewis said. "He thought Joan and Jennings were having an affair, so he followed them to a parking lot and shot Jennings. Everybody always said Walter shot him in the ball, but it wasn't true. It was in the groin area—I saw the scar." And were they having an affair? "I'm sure they were," she said. "Big deal!"

Though Lewis made eyes at Mickey Rooney in "The Strip" and Victor Ma-

ture in "Affair with a Stranger," and got yelled at by both Charlton Heston and Lorne Greene in "Earthquake," she never quite graduated from starlet to star. "Look at the wall," she said, indicating a wall of photos. "The one in black, that's when M-G-M wanted me to be a femme fatale like Lana Turner. I ran into Lana at Saks Fifth Avenue, and she told me, 'I'm pregnant, and they're scared shitless, and they're trying to make you into me. Don't do it. *Be yourself!*' Well, it was tough. The next day, they dressed me up like Janie Powell, like a little girl"—she pointed to another photo, in which she looked exceedingly demure. "I never got to play a



Monica Lewis

part I loved, a part where I wasn't just somebody's idea of tits and legs."

Her mood turned wistful. "The only one from my era who's still around and still a friend is Tony Bennett." She sang a snatch from "Cheek to Cheek," which Bennett and Lady Gaga had performed at the Grammy Awards, her voice bright and warm and full of mischief. "Sinatra, who'd be a hundred this year, he's gone. Peggy Lee is gone. Eydie Gormé is gone. Ava Gardner, one of my best friends, and Betty Bacall—we were in 'Johnny 2 x 4' together, and she had the measles—they're gone." Lewis folded her hands in her lap. Ten days later, she would die in her sleep. "The last time I saw Tony, we were crossing the street in New York, on Fifth Avenue. He held his hands up dramatically and stopped traffic, and he hugged me. Then he said, 'Go now—you can cross.'"

—Tad Friend

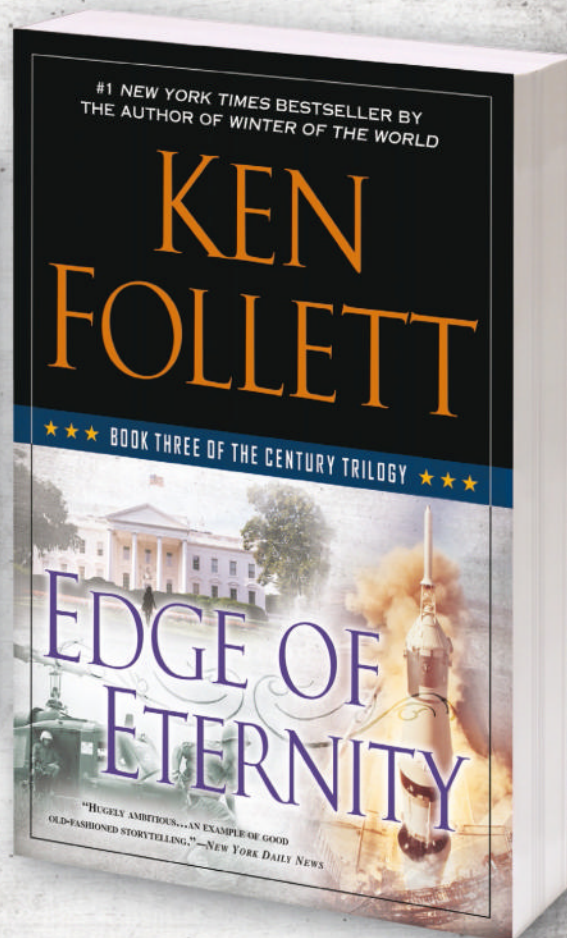
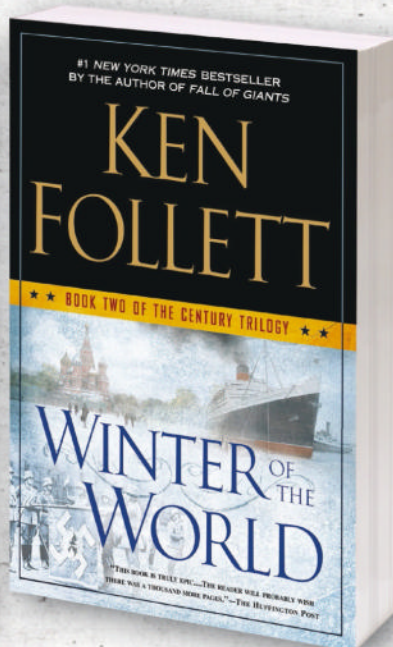
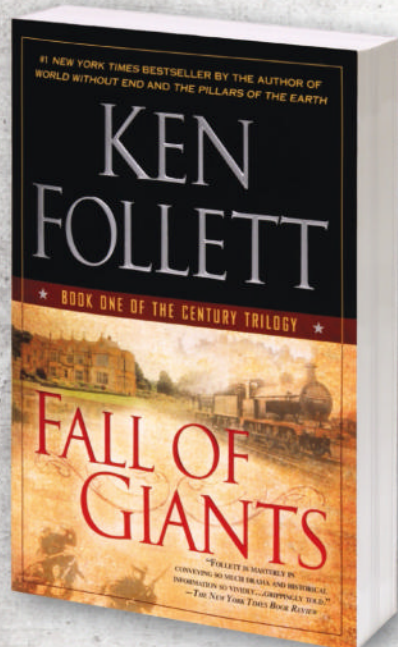


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THE FINANCIAL PAGE

DROP IN THE BUCKET

The stock market is not the economy. That's a simple financial truth, but it's hard to keep in mind in the midst of a sell-off like the one we saw last Monday, especially with headlines screaming about a "BLOODBATH IN GLOBAL MARKETS." So, even as the market rallied last week, concerns lingered over the possibility that the sharp decline in stock prices boded ill for the U.S. economy as a whole, giving us front-page stories fretting about the "real threat to the American economy" and warning of "a leaner era ahead." These worries are almost certainly unfounded. The market sell-off in the U.S. wasn't just a matter of panic—it reflected investors' genuine anxieties about the future. But those anxieties have surprisingly little to do with the current state of the American economy.

The sell-off was driven mainly by the turmoil in China, which is dealing with the precipitous deflation of a stock-market bubble and is struggling to maintain its economic growth. This has led many to believe that China will grow more slowly than anticipated, while Chinese leaders' sometimes ham-fisted policy moves in recent months have raised questions about their ability to manage the economy. Given how much we hear about China's economic importance, you might think that these problems would have a big impact on the U.S. They won't. In fact, total U.S. exports to China are just a hundred and sixty-five billion dollars, less than one per cent of G.D.P. There are certainly firms—including commodity producers, microchip makers, and fast-food companies—for which China is a huge market today. But for most firms the prospect of selling billions of products to Chinese consumers remains more of a promise than a reality. Goldman Sachs, for instance, estimates that just two per cent of the S.&P. 500's revenues come from sales to China.

So, while a significant economic downturn in China would squeeze Apple, Yum! Brands (e.g., Pizza Hut), and Iowa farmers, most Americans, and most American companies, would barely notice it, at least in the short term. (Goldman Sachs estimates that a one-per-cent drop in China's growth rate translates into a mere 0.06-per-cent drop in the United States's G.D.P.) And the flow of goods we import from China is unlikely to be affected by the downturn at all.

Globally, China's slowing pace of growth has certainly had spillover effects. In the past decade, its boom has created a voracious appetite for commodities of all kinds, from iron ore and copper to oil. As growth there has slowed, the price of

these commodities has fallen, and the price of oil has been pushed down further by a production glut. This has been bad for energy and mining stocks, and it's been very hard on developing economies, like those in Latin America, which relied on commodity exports to China. But for the U.S. economy cheaper commodities are a good thing, putting more money in consumers' pockets and lowering production costs for American firms.

Some pundits worry that all this market turmoil could presage something like the meltdown of 2007-09 or the Asian financial crisis of 1997-98. Yet those were ultimately severe insolvency crises, involving enormous piles of debt that were not going to be repaid, companies and countries going bust, and economies that were deep in recession. The situation today isn't analogous. Unlike the Asian countries that got in trouble in the late nineteen-nineties, China is a creditor to the rest of the world, not a debtor. It has plenty of debt troubles—thanks to enormous overborrowing by corporations

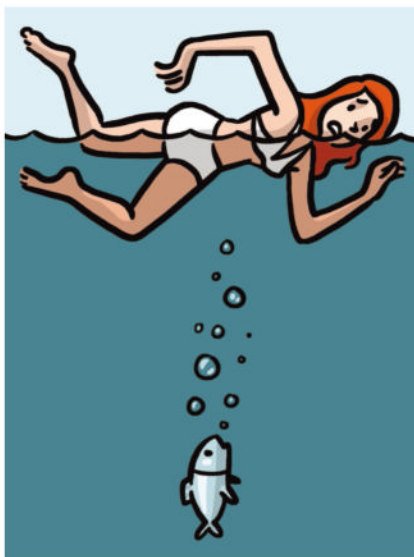
and local governments—but those are largely internal issues, unlikely to go global. As for the struggling emerging-market economies, they, too, are in much better shape than they were in the late nineties. Nowadays, these countries typically have sizable dollar reserves and, instead of running big current-account deficits, are mostly running surpluses with the rest of the world. So the ingredients for a full-blown financial crisis don't seem to be in place.

This doesn't mean that the stock-market correction was irrational. It reflected concerns about the long-term future, particularly when it comes to China. China isn't hugely important to U.S. companies or exporters today. But the expectation has been that it will become

so, before long. Now investors are wondering if the scenario of a billion consumers happily carrying iPhones will take a lot longer to arrive. And there are similar concerns about emerging markets in general. As the level of uncertainty among investors rises, their tolerance for risk falls, which means they'll pay less for risky assets, and so stock prices go down.

To say that the stock market isn't the economy doesn't mean that stock-market crises can't become contagious; they can dampen what Keynes called the "animal spirits" of managers and consumers, leading them to cut back on investment and spending. Stock prices do have some impact on consumer spending (the richer consumers feel, the more willing they are to spend). Still, market moves need to be severe and long-lasting to make a real difference. The 1987 crash, for instance, saw stocks drop more than twenty-two per cent in a single day. Yet it had no measurable impact on corporate investment, and only a short-lived effect on consumer spending. Americans' 401(k)s are a bit lighter than they were two weeks ago. America's economy looks pretty much the same.

—James Surowiecki



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AN EXILE IN THE CORN BELT

Israel's funniest Palestinian writer decamps to the Midwest.

BY RUTH MARGALIT

A century ago, on Mt. Scopus, in Jerusalem, Albert Einstein gave the first lecture at the future Hebrew University, a ninety-minute inquest into cosmic mysteries: the meaning of time, the properties of light. In June, 2014, Sayed Kashua, a novelist, columnist, television writer, and perhaps the most visible representative of Palestin-

minutes, the invitation was unprecedented—the first time the university had brought in an Arab to speak at graduation.

Kashua, who is forty, with thick, once black hair and a brooding gaze, slouched a little behind the lectern. He grew up in Tira, an Arab village in central Israel, in a family of fruit farmers

Arab family to Israeli audiences for the first time. It made him a celebrity not just on the comfortable left but, as one television executive told me, among “taxi-drivers and supporters of Beitar,” a Jerusalem soccer club whose right-wing fans have been known to chant “I hate all Arabs.”

Standing before the students and their families, Kashua decided to say a few words about the political climate. These were agitated days. A week earlier, three Israeli teen-agers had been kidnapped while hitching a ride in a settlement south of Jerusalem. Kashua recounted how his son told him about it, garbling the news reports and the results of that summer’s World Cup soccer tournament. In a recent game,



Dismayed by Israeli politics, Kashua moved to Illinois. “He wants to be in the most parve place on earth,” his agent said.

ian life in Israel, trudged to the same spot with a more earthbound goal. A reluctant public speaker, he was there to deliver a commencement address to the graduating class. His subject was life between languages, familiar ground for an author who identifies himself as Palestinian but writes solely in Hebrew. Though he was given only fifteen

who had lived in the same house since the days of the British Mandate. In the past decade, he has become the kind of writer whose column, in the left-leaning newspaper *Haaretz*, “people hang on their fridge,” as a colleague put it. In 2007, a sitcom he wrote, titled “Arab Labor” (a Sabra idiom for second-rate work), had its debut, introducing an

the Netherlands had grabbed five goals; now, his son said, “Palestine grabbed three.” His line drew nervous laughs, and Kashua quickly reassured the crowd: “It’s my fervent hope . . . the boys will be back home, safe and sound.” But he confessed to feeling “a stabbing in the chest,” and asked, “Does the hope that they will return home imply

some sort of declaration that the settlements can be considered legitimate?”

The next day, Ynet, the most widely read news site in Israel, ran a story about Kashua's speech. It quoted one graduate saying that Kashua had complained that his children “bothered him” with news of the kidnapping “while he tried to watch the World Cup.” Another student said, “Kashua used the technique of joke-telling but injected his speech with radical statements.”

Political debate in Israel is vigorous, if not always elegant, often summoning the old Hebrew phrase that describes “a dialogue between deaf people.” But it has been dampened in recent years by a series of government-sponsored bills: one demanding that non-Jewish Israelis take loyalty oaths; another authorizing the finance ministry to withhold funds from organizations deemed—however vaguely—to be violating Israel's foundational tenet of a “Jewish and democratic” state. Kashua, like other Arab Israelis in the public eye, was used to having his words scrutinized. But the summer's events felt different. As the conflict in Gaza escalated into war, the premiere of a movie based on his memoir “Dancing Arabs” was hastily scrapped. Flag-draped extremists in Tel Aviv brandished metal rods at antiwar demonstrators. The atmosphere of intimidation became so intense that Ayman Odeh, the youthful leader of the Joint List, an alliance of Arab-backed parties that represent Palestinian aspirations in Israel, announced that an “age of ostracism” had taken hold.

Within the Green Line that separates Israel proper from Gaza and the West Bank, Arab Israelis make up twenty per cent of the population. For liberal Israelis, and for Arabs who hope to be accepted as equals, Kashua embodied the country's stated ideal of coexistence—of Arab Israelis' full legal and civil integration. For a decade, he had lived with his wife, Najat, in Ramat Denya, a Jewish neighborhood in Jerusalem, and their children attended the city's only bilingual school. In a country where columnists have a flair for grandiloquence, Kashua's columns are conversational, confiding, anecdotal, centered on the rituals and trials of bourgeois life, like the “holiday tour” that includes stopping at sixteen relatives' houses, or the visiting electrician

who reprimands him for his children's excessive television viewing. While his writing is rarely explicitly political, a sense of uprootedness lurks; when the electrician, also an Arab, overhears the kids speaking Hebrew, Kashua can't stop apologizing.

Coexistence of the kind that Kashua represents seems increasingly out of reach these days, when more than a third of Jewish Israelis openly say that Arab citizens shouldn't be entitled to equal rights. Of 1.7 million Arabs in Israel, perhaps forty thousand lead middle-class lives in mixed cities. Ayman Odeh told me that his party's goal is for Arab citizens “to take part in every institution in the country—except for security, foreign relations, and immigration absorption, because these institutions blur the lines of our national identity.” But even his more hopeful speeches don't envision such inclusiveness for ten more years.

Two weeks after Kashua's commencement address, searchers discovered the bodies of the three kidnapped teenagers in a mound of rocks in a field near Hebron. In Jerusalem, far-right protesters called on Jews to avenge the murders. Kashua watched the news, terrified. As far as he knew, there were only five Arabs living in Ramat Denya: him, Najat, and their three children. When air-raid sirens warned of incoming rockets from Gaza, Kashua sent his kids to the bomb shelter, but he stayed away, uneasy around his neighbors. One day, his teen-age daughter was pummelled with water bottles, apparently for being Arab.

A day after the teen-agers' funerals, a sixteen-year-old Palestinian was found dead amid the pines in the Jerusalem Forest. He had been bludgeoned and burned alive—an act of revenge for the teen-agers' murder, his killers later claimed. After that, Kashua said, “I didn't want my children to leave the house.” He was scheduled to depart later that summer with his family for Champaign, Illinois, to teach for a year at the University of Illinois campus there. He moved up the date of their flight and changed the tickets to one-way. “I'm not coming back to this building, not coming back to this neighborhood, not coming back to Jerusa-

lem,” he wrote in his *Haaretz* column. “The lie I'd told my children about a future in which Arabs and Jews share the country equally was over.”

For Kashua's faithful readers, his departure symbolized the country's decline into angry factionalism. The Israeli author Amos Oz told me, “The fact that he left saddened me greatly. I can tell you that over the summer there wasn't a decent Israeli who didn't have similar thoughts.”

On the day the Kashuas were to leave, they scurried to prepare. A news crew from the investigative program “Fact” followed them as Najat filled large plastic bags with food. “They practically left with the pots still on the stove,” a neighbor told me. That night, a minivan drove the family to Ben-Gurion Airport. But first—snaking northwest, on rutted roads—they stopped in Tira. Under moonlight, Kashua kissed his relatives goodbye. “I'll send you all Adidas,” he joked, as his mother cried silently in the background. His father, Darwish, sat by a picket fence in the back yard, smoking a cigarette. “He didn't even consult,” Darwish said, visibly shaken. “He said, ‘That's it, I'm leaving the country.’” Finally, Sayed approached him. “Bye, Aba,” he said softly. The two men embraced.

On the airplane, the heat of the day replaced by the cool nothing-air of transit, Kashua vowed that he wouldn't return. “Please,” he said under his breath, “take me far, far away.”

The story of how Sayed Kashua came to write about Sayed Kashua sounds like a typical Sayed Kashua tale: the result of equal parts constraint and conviction. When he was sixteen, the only Arab student in his high-school class in Jerusalem, a teacher assigned an essay about a day in the life of a figure of the students' choice. Kashua had the idea of writing—“hardcore-like,” he said—about a dead person. But a classmate who had lost her father asked if she could take the idea. He decided instead to tackle the only subject he knew well: “I wrote ‘A Day in the Life of Sayed Kashua.’ And I've been writing it ever since.”

The second of four brothers, Kashua was a nervous child—“scared of everything,” he said. At night, after his parents went to bed, he slipped into his

grandmother's room, where he heard stories about a bygone time, about "the fields and the lands and the first rain." It was from her that he learned how to tell a story, and from her that he found out about "the damned war" of 1948, when Israel won independence and more than seven hundred thousand Palestinians became refugees. His grandmother described how a Jewish sniper killed his grandfather as he was picking grapes, leaving her alone with four daughters and a two-month-old son. When the war was over, she wanted to return to the fields. "So she tries to head out," Kashua said, "and she sees an Israeli soldier, and he tells her, 'There are no fields.'"

Bereft of her land, she continued to work in Tira, twenty miles north of Tel Aviv, as a hired field hand. When Kashua's father married, he brought his wife to live with his family, across the hill from the village mosque. Today, Tira is an overcrowded city, rife with corruption and gang violence. But when Kashua was growing up the streets were quiet and nameless. On airless summer nights, neighbors slept on their rooftops. His mother taught at the local school; his father, after years of farming, went to work for the interior ministry, issuing passports in a basement office. "Sometimes he got so bored that he'd renew all our I.D.s and passports," Kashua has written. Like other people in the village, his father was active in the Communist Party; children grew up singing Red Army songs. Tira may be the only place on earth where you can meet a man named Abu Castro.

One day, Kashua, rummaging in an old suitcase in his grandmother's closet, found a postcard stamped "Damon Prison, Haifa," and dated 1970. It read, "Tell Mother to stop crying. I will be released soon." Kashua discovered that his father had been held for more than two years in administrative detention, without trial. A dusty clipping from *Haaretz* described his arrest for failing to thwart a bombing in a Hebrew University cafeteria, in 1969, which wounded twenty-nine people. "Some of those involved in the bombing were apparently friends of his," Kashua said. "But he never talked about it." Newspaper reports from the time say that Darwish Kashua, then a student at the

university, was held on suspicion of "assisting" the terrorists, but he was never charged.

After Darwish was released, he named his firstborn son Sam, after the SAM missiles that Egypt fired at Israel during the Yom Kippur War. To his mortification, his sons grew up wholly uninterested in politics. ("We can't even draw a flag," Kashua writes.) He urged them to excel in school and, above all, to read. "He thought that Lenin, Trotsky, and Marx were all the literature you needed," Kashua said. "So I tried. I read all of that shit. That and 'The Old Man and the Sea,' in Arabic. Every Arab home I ever knew had 'The Old Man and the Sea.'"

Kashua was fourteen when the Israel Arts and Sciences Academy, the country's most prestigious high school, reached out to Arab villages, seeking to diversify. Dozens of kids were bused in to take an entrance exam, and only Kashua and one older boy passed. Kashua arrived at school with a pencil-line mustache and a loud, billowy shirt—"Qalqilya fashion," he calls it, after the provincial West Bank town. Outside the building, kids hounded him, chanting, "Muhammad is dead." The first day, on the bus ride home, a soldier asked to see his identity card. Kashua, who wasn't old enough to get an Israeli I.D., was thrown off the bus. "That's when I started to understand what it meant to be Arab," he said. Sobbing, he called his father. "Whose son are you?" his father said, laughing. "When a soldier didn't notice me on the bus I would wave my I.D. and say, 'I'm Arab, take me off!'"

Arabic is a diglossic language, with literary and colloquial versions. Kashua, whose Arabic education ended when he enrolled in the Jerusalem academy, isn't versed in the literary one. The books he learned most deeply were classics of modern Hebrew, and they suggested a world he didn't inhabit. Books by Amos Oz, David Grossman, and Meir Shalev implied that the Hebrew canon was closed to anyone who wasn't a fair-skinned Ashkenazi. When Arabs appeared in their stories, it was usually as a Jewish character's foil or negative image—what the Lebanese novelist

Elias Khoury has called "a shadow."

Kashua likes to say that he fell in love *in* Hebrew, not *with* Hebrew. It was during his last year of high school, with a Jewish classmate. "I loved her like you can only love your first love," he said. But the girl's mother didn't approve of the relationship—"I don't want my daughter to live in an Arab village," she told him. After graduation, as Kashua's schoolmates left to perform their mandatory Army service, he stayed in Jerusalem and enrolled in university. He was lonely and quickly became depressed. Two events saved him: meeting Najat, a first-year student who also came from Tira, and beginning to report for a weekly paper called *Kol Ha'ir*.

Kashua's first assignment, when he was twenty-one, was to cover an arts festival in Arab East Jerusalem. Kashua told me that he abhorred "any sign of nationalism" in a cultural context, and so his piece "made fun of the whole thing." Yosef Cohen, then the editor of the paper, said, "In Hebrew media, there's a tendency to see Arabs either through the sight of the rifle or as the eternal martyrs. Sayed did neither. He showed Arabs as human beings, with a sense of irony that was quite rare."

Kashua decided to remain in Jerusalem and write, but when he told his parents they were devastated. "Art is for Jews," his mother told him. "Minorities need a profession." At night, in an unheated studio apartment he shared with Najat, in the Arab neighborhood of Beit Safafa, Kashua started writing a bleak, meandering memoir. A group of young journalists from *Kol Ha'ir* met after hours, reading aloud from their work. At those meetings, Kashua tried out chapters:

There are only Arabs in the emergency room. Women who seem older than they are, with head scarves and plastic thongs, drag themselves through the corridors. Sometimes they bite the edge of their scarves. They seem lost, not knowing where to go. Why the hell do they have to look like that? Why do they even go out of the house? And why are those plastic thongs still being sold anyway?

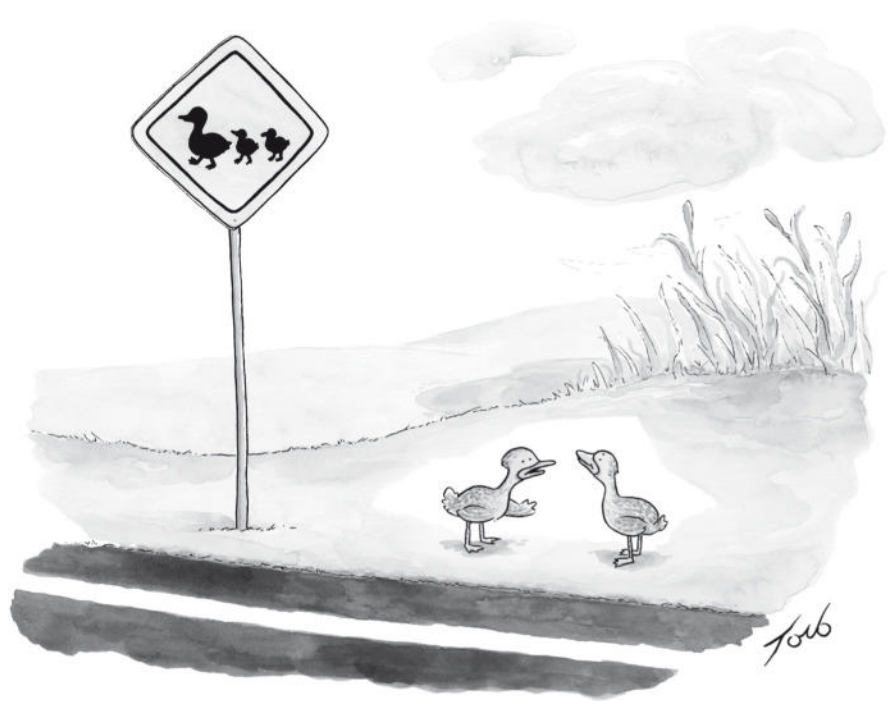
Just don't let anyone think I'm one of them or that I'm like them. Just don't let them call out my wife's name when it's her turn.

In 2002, the memoir, "Dancing Arabs," was published, and it introduced Kashua as a bracing voice in Hebrew literature. The *Times* compared the book to James Weldon Johnson's

"Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man." But being the anointed Arab interlocutor for Jewish readers came at a price. Najat warned Kashua against publishing a book that portrayed their home town as a petty, claustrophobic place, and that detailed, often in comic and critical terms, such taboos as dishonoring one's parents or considering infidelity. "I didn't want to deal with these things," she recalled. "It would have been difficult for anyone to share, but especially for us, coming from a society that is—what can you do—very conservative." One reviewer of the novel, in the Arabic-language newspaper *Al Ittihad*, told me that he took issue with Kashua's writing "about his grandmother's closet, about her underthings." Almost immediately, Kashua regretted writing the book.

"Arab society in Israel suffers from a syndrome of 'Who's more Arab than whom?'" Ayman Sikseck, a young Arab Israeli novelist who writes in Hebrew, said. "And once you coöperate with the Israeli establishment then you're supposedly no longer Arab." The political map points to a precarious reality. Two-thirds of Arab Israelis, including Kashua and the politicians of the Joint List, support the idea of a Palestinian state. But, according to a 2012 poll by the Israel Democracy Institute, only a quarter of them are willing to have the cities they live in belong to it. Many Arabs, like Kashua, consider themselves both Palestinian and Israeli, a bifurcated identity that speaks to years of strife and longing. "People keep bringing up this question of 'Would you want to live in a Palestinian state?'" Kashua told me. "Is there a Palestinian state? Where are its borders, exactly? What they're asking is if you'd want to live behind a fence and be occupied. Of course not."

Kashua made this ambivalence the subject of his next book, "Let It Be Morning," a dystopian thriller about the residents of an Arab village who wake up one day to find themselves besieged by Israeli tanks, prompting a struggle to survive. As people claw through trash heaps, looking for food, they realize that the tanks are the by-product of a peace agreement; residents are under the jurisdiction of a new Palestinian state. When the novel came out, in 2004, the



"Society puts a lot of pressure on women to have kids."

Arab journalist Ala Hlehel said, "It upgraded him from immediately suspect to immediately guilty."

That winter, Kashua got a call from the television producer Danny Paran, asking to meet. Paran, an observant Jew, is an outlier in Israeli show business, whose ranks tend to be secular and left-wing, but he is a respected veteran, and he had been following Kashua's newspaper columns. He had an idea for a series that he wanted to market to the Arab world.

"He took me to some kosher café," Kashua recalled, and "kept fixing his *kippa*." Kashua was fascinated to encounter a Jewish producer who was interested in Arab television, but he found Paran's idea laughable. Hadn't he heard of the Arab world's boycott of Israel? They decided to collaborate on a different concept: a comedy about Jewish-Arab relations. Paran saw it as an antidote to the "heavy" political dramas that tried to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Kashua envisioned a series closer to home, "about an Arab who really wants to do everything in order to be accepted as an equal in Israeli society—but it doesn't

work." He had another motive, too, he later acknowledged. Although Arab Israelis represent a fifth of the population, in 2011 they made up one per cent of the characters on national TV and, according to a report by the agency that oversees commercial broadcasts in Israel, "usually appear in the context of crime and violence." Kashua wanted "people to get used to seeing Arab actors on prime-time television."

Kashua set to work, devising a deceptively modest script that skewered stereotypes among both Jews and Arabs. He said that he wanted each episode to touch on a stigma in Israeli society: "the whole thing with Arabs and dogs," "Arabs and swimming," and "Arabs and driving" (are afraid of, can't, and are bad at, respectively). The script, whose dialogue was mostly in Arabic, to be screened with Hebrew subtitles, addressed the conflict at its most mundane: the measly water pressure in Arab towns, the spotty Internet coverage, the dearth of Arab gardeners following crackdowns. As Yonatan Amir, a friend of Kashua's, said, the show helped explain "the kind of politics that arises from the dirty dishes in the sink."

"Arab Labor" centers on Amjad Elian,

a sycophantic Arab journalist for a Hebrew newspaper, who lives in an Arab village before moving with his family to a Jewish neighborhood in Jerusalem. In the pilot, Amjad is fed up with being pulled over at checkpoints. He blasts Army Radio and puts on his best accent when addressing the soldiers, but nothing helps. Bewildered, he turns to a Jewish colleague, who tells him that the problem is with his car: "A Subaru like yours could belong only to Arabs or young settlers." He recommends a Land Rover, so Amjad proceeds to buy one—stolen—from a local Arab dealer. The soldiers now wave him through. But Amjad's father is livid when he hears that his son was seen wearing a seat belt. "Seat belt!" he tells his wife, and makes an effeminate gesture.

Kashua used prejudice like a boomerang: the moment a viewer snickered at a joke, she became its next target. "I'm not sure whom I'm laughing at, exactly," he once said. "I think I'm laughing at Amjad, but maybe I'm really laughing at Israelis for thinking these things." Incisive as Kashua was about right-wingers, he was even more unsparing toward the left and its hypocrisies. After a Jewish neighbor mistakes Amjad for the building's new staircase cleaner ("Don't leave a puddle by the door," she warns), she awkwardly backpedals by announcing her membership in a leftist party: "We vote Meretz. Just so you know."

For more than a year, Paran shopped around Kashua's script, but network executives weren't interested. "The challenge was to bring an Arab-speaking show to mainstream Israel," Udi Lion, then a director of special programming at Keshet Media Group, said. "Even worldwide this hasn't been done. There's no Turkish-language show in Germany, no Spanish-speaking show on NBC, for example. Not in a foreign language, let alone in the language of the enemy."

It didn't help that Kashua was certain the series would fail. "I would throw seventy per cent of 'Arab Labor' in the trash," he told me. He can be exacting on set, and, like many comedy writers, he is riddled with anxiety. "How should

I put this gently," Ran Telem, an executive at Keshet, said. "You know those girls in school who always come out of an exam crying and thinking they've failed and then they ace it? That's Sayed."

In April, 2005, Keshet won a ten-year deal to produce shows for Channel 2, the most widely watched channel on television. The agreement, drafted by a committee of public representatives, had a high-minded purpose: to develop shows made by and about "previously disenfranchised" sectors of society. By year's end, Kashua's series had been green-lighted.

"Arab Labor" was an overnight hit. Twenty-five per cent of viewers tuned

in for the premiere, making it the third-most-watched series on TV. The production felt dated—misunderstandings spun out of control, set to punchy music—but the dialogue was unlike anything else on TV. For the most part, Jewish critics praised the series—*Haaretz* called it "easily the best show" on Israeli television—though they tended to stress its "importance," rather than its entertainment value.

But in the Arab Israeli community the series, even more than Kashua's novels, was met with scorn. Some Arab intellectuals said that the show trafficked in the very stereotypes that it was meant to upend. Amal Jamal, a professor of political science at Tel Aviv University, described it as "a fig-leaf show." Kashua had done as much as he could, he said, but the show didn't go far enough: "It doesn't present racism as institutionalized, sanctioned, deep, and systemic." Others attacked Kashua personally. A newspaper affiliated with the Islamist movement called him "a slave to the Jewish masters." Pamphlets circulated in Tira calling him a "Jewish pig."

One day in 2007, during the worst of this onslaught, Kashua sat in his parents' living room, in Tira, and watched an episode of "Arab Labor." The scene is depicted in the documentary "Sayed Kashua: Forever Scared," by the filmmaker Dorit Zimbalist. "In today's episode, there was ninety per cent Arabic—on prime-time Channel 2!" Kashua tells his parents, sounding embittered.

If that didn't register with Arab Israelis, what would? "Screw those Arab sons of bitches," he mutters.

Reflecting on the criticism and the vilification, he says, "You hear things like that and say, 'Fuck, for whose benefit am I carrying this burden?'" At the same time, he wonders whether his Arab critics are right. "Do you know what I'm fed up with? With this road I've taken, slowly and gently, just like this series. I say, 'Yes, through culture, slowly they'll understand.' But it's not true. And Israelis can't take the truth to their faces." Growing angry, he says, "I suck up to them, and what do I do on Passover? The column for Passover. I have to amuse Jews to be read over the weekend, so they can laugh at the Arab. I want to shout 'Happy holiday'—but, you know, really shout it." He cups a hand over his mouth and bellows, "*Happy holiday! Have a happy holiday!*"

Before I visited Kashua in Champaign, where he recently extended his contract with the University of Illinois for three more years, he warned me, "It's one of the most boring places you'll ever go to." He insisted on meeting me at the airport, and arrived in a behemoth black Jeep, a booster seat in the back. "Does it smell like chicken?" he asked as I got in.

We drove through suburban streets to pick up his sons, who are ten and four, from school. His kids are by now trilingual and, unlike their parents, seem happily settled in their new surroundings. They argued over whether their Playmobil came from Target or from Walmart, while their older sister—"the tallest girl you can imagine," Kashua said—was at basketball practice. At their house, a modest brick-and-clapboard rental, a car with an "Obama '08" sticker was parked in the driveway.

Najat, a psychotherapist by training, appears in Israeli public life mostly as a crabbled presence, the object of her husband's jokes. ("For a long time, I thought that depression can breed creativity," Kashua once said, at a party for a season premiere. "She showed me that so, too, can sexual frustration.") In person, she was graceful, with a pearly smile and dark hair coiled in a loose bun. She delighted in her kids' Americanness—"Wait





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the devil go,
but to paradise?”*

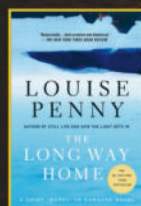
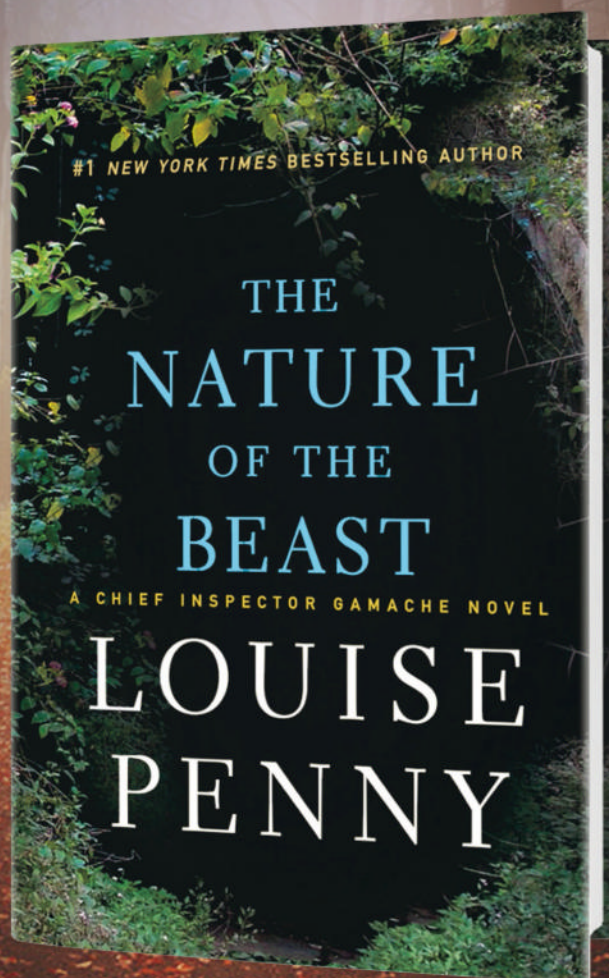
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till we tell *Fletcher!*” she mimicked her youngest—and had a calm authority over her husband.

As we sat down, I asked whether the family followed the news from home. “Enough to not want to go back,” Kashua said. That day, someone had spray-painted “Death to the Arabs” on the bilingual school that the children had attended. A new government policy briefly forbade Palestinian workers to ride the same buses as Jewish settlers. “People say ‘Come back—just give it some time,’” he said. “Fuck that. I’m tired of waiting.” Still, in a recent column he had confessed to having an “overwhelming desire to go back home.” He couldn’t rid himself of the notion of the homeland that his father had instilled in him: “He etched in our brains the fear of leaving the country.”

During my visit, Kashua attempted, twice, to go to a documentary about Edward Said and once to a lecture on the Middle East. But there was always a child to drop off, a class to prepare for. The socializing he did was confined mostly to Israeli expats, of the sort who read him at home. He was struggling to create a life for himself, as was Najat. “Loneliness isn’t the problem,” she explained. “It’s the sense of having to build something new at an age when you’re not exactly ready for something new.”

Kashua’s creative life remains in Israel. A series he has written about a depressed comedy writer—his “Louie,” as some members of the production crew put it—is being edited. His column in *Haaretz* still runs every Friday; he recently described himself scrutinizing dishes on a restaurant menu with his daughter. (“It’s Cajun style,” she tells him. “I don’t think you’ll like it.”) “A Borrowed Identity,” the movie based on “Dancing Arabs,” was released in the U.S. this summer, but the interpretation is wooden, and it didn’t play much beyond the festival circuit. Those close to Kashua sense his displacement. His longtime literary agent, Deborah Harris, was baffled by his decision to settle in Champaign, rather than in New York or Boston. “I think he really wanted it to be exile,” she said. “He wants to be in the most *parve* place in the world.”

One afternoon, I met Kashua outside the building of the university’s Jewish-studies department, where he teaches

advanced Hebrew. He was smoking next to a notice that said, “This is a smoke-free campus.” The irony of his situation—a Palestinian writer leaves Israel only to find himself teaching Hebrew to American Jews—hadn’t escaped him. When he was offered the job, he said, he warned the department head that students might adopt his Arabic accent in Hebrew and be “kicked out of Birthright,” the organization that offers Jewish kids free trips to Israel.

Inside, five students chatted around an oblong table, and a framed photograph on the wall showed a young woman holding a sign that read, “I am not a self-hating Jew.” Kashua is an uncertain, even timid teacher. In Hebrew, he asked the students to hand in homework at the end of class, then immediately demurred: “I don’t know. Do you want to?” Still, he bantered easily with them. When he asked them to translate “insert” and got a few snickers, he smiled and scolded them: “Only the shit words you understand.” Grammar bored him, but he loosened up a little as the students began reading a Hebrew translation of Italo Calvino’s “Adventure of Two Spouses,” struggling through language far too intricately shaded for them to manage. As they rose to leave, he handed them more pages: another story, this one by the Israeli writer S. Y. Agnon. “I was told it’s good for you,” he said. “Because Hebrew is important for you, right? And for me, too. Unfortunately.”

On my last night in Champaign, Kashua took me to a local sports bar, a barn-size establishment that he referred to as his “little neighborhood-y place.” Before leaving Israel, he said, he had lost his driver’s license in a D.U.I., and so he was allowing himself only one drink. But, as we sat, the resolution receded. Over Green Line beer, he spoke of his father, of his family in Tira, of Jerusalem.

It had been a difficult spring. Kashua’s father had been given a diagnosis of lung cancer, and died less than a month later. “Something screwed up in my head,” Kashua said. The Israeli elections, in March, had been cause for guarded optimism at first. Watching from afar, he had written in *Haaretz* that Odeh had “managed to instill some faith

in me.” The Joint List did better than expected—becoming the third-largest party in parliament—but the election was most notable for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s attempts to court far-right votes. During the campaign, Netanyahu announced that he would not permit a Palestinian state—“It’s Us or Them” was his slogan—and warned ominously of Arabs “coming out in droves to the polls.” The rhetoric attracted nationalist voters, who helped to secure him a fourth term in office.

More recently, Jewish extremists fire-bombed a house in the West Bank village of Duma, killing an eighteen-month-old Palestinian boy and his father. Several incidents followed, in which Palestinians stabbed Israelis in the street, raising fears of a third Palestinian uprising. Kashua wrote mournfully in *Haaretz* about searching Google Earth for the torched house in Duma, and then for his parents’ home, in Tira: “I try clicking on the arrow to move myself a little closer. Just a tiny bit more, and I’m inside the house.”

In the bar, Kashua considered the distance between him and his old home. Despite pressure from Keshet, he has refused to write a fifth season of “Arab Labor.” He told me, “I couldn’t do humor anymore.” He was under contract for a new novel—about a journalist who sets out to write his father’s story while living in a small university town—but he hadn’t started. “I used to go to a bar, look at the kitchen, and see two Arab workers, or even Africans. I could be accurate; I could describe them. Here, I go, I look, I don’t know what I see.”

Mostly, he talked about his children, and his fear that they would grow up to resent him. “For confusing them,” he explained. “For the fact that they will have nowhere to be. Not there and not there and not here.” He once told his parents that, despite the hostility, he loved their home town more than anything else in the world. In the bar, he asked, “What kind of Tira do my kids have?” He seemed to weigh the question. “I wanted a more comfortable life for them. But you can’t raise children in Israel on values of full equality. Arab children, I mean. Jewish children maybe you can lie to. But when my children find out they’re not equal where will they go?” ♦

CONFAB

BY IAN FRAZIER

Sit down and talk with your kids about it. If you don't think you have time in your family's busy schedule, *make* time to talk about it. Your kids should hear about it from you, as soon as is convenient, in a setting that's familiar and unthreatening. Chances are, they know about it already, and will be grateful to you for dealing with it openly.

The first time we talked about it with our kids I followed the advice I'm giving you now. Marjorie and I gathered them together after supper and told them that we needed to talk about something very important. Then we all sat down around the kitchen table—and I can't stress too strongly how important it is to sit down. Some of the kids kept wanting to stand up, but we kept telling them to sit down. Then, once we were all seated, we began to talk about it. The conversation was forthright, frank, measured, and equal in seriousness to what we were talking about.

When we were finished, we asked the kids if they had any questions or concerns. Our second son, Miles, got a thoughtful look on his face, and posed a question that I remember to this day. "Mom, Dad," he said, with some hesitation. "Did you know that Alfred Hitchcock had his navel surgically removed?"

Are we always listening as closely as we should be when our kids ask us questions? If Marjorie and I had not talked about what we talked candidly about with our kids that day, Miles's meaningful question probably would not have come up. Neither of us had ever heard that particular "fact" about Alfred Hitchcock, so at first we could not be of much help. But we assured Miles that we admired the critical thinking he had used to arrive at his question. His honest inquisitiveness then inspired his sister June, a kindergartner, to ask a follow-up.

"If a little bee played baseball," June inquired, "would he need his whole body just to carry the ball?"

Springboarding off June's contribu-

tion, Jason, age eight, then introduced a tangential line of questioning that put the discussion into deeper perspective. "O.K., Billy Nolan told me this," Jason began. "Is it true that in an average lifetime an average person eats six spiders in their sleep?"

Marjorie and I have taught our children that every question is equally valid—i.e., there is no such thing as a



"wrong" question. Naturally, when we've been talking about a subject as full of implications as the subject of our family conference that evening, every question must be weighed respectfully and with due reflection. We now had three topics for further looking into:

1. The Hitchcock-navel question.
2. Bees and baseball.
3. Spiders being eaten, etc.

Each of these had the potential to open a new angle on the important exchange of ideas between our children and ourselves which had begun when we all sat down around the table. Quite honestly, I thought we now had plenty to deal with. Sadik, however, added an interesting sidelight when he asked whether it was possible to make lasagna out of different kinds of ice cream, so I put "Lasagna/ice cream?" as No. 4 on our list.

Kids take in so much more than we give them credit for. The wheels in their heads are always turning. As proof of that, Jaden, who's five, raised his hand. When Marjorie encouraged him to say what was on his mind, he shyly asked us to guess which part of his nose he had just picked. I was not sure where that question fit on the list I already

had, so I started a new list, "Jaden's nose: which part picked?" and told him that we would deal with his question soon.

Perhaps apropos of June's question about the bee, her sister, Mabel, who will be four next month, wondered out loud whether dinosaurs had butts. I admitted I did not see what that had to do with the subject of our family confab, and I pressed, gently, for the relevance of Mabel's ask. By way of clarification, she offered that Tyler (her older brother, age seven) had said he could kick a dinosaur's butt, and she, Mabel, did not know if dinosaurs *had* butts. Where to put that question on the lists? I told Mabel that I was writing it on the first list, but in fact I only pretended to.

The twins, Dashiell and Mikey, who are ten and very into tech things, brought up a concern with a limited but real connection to what we were exploring. They asked if Marjorie or I knew what the loudest-decibel burp was. We've never pretended to be all knowing, and as it happened we did not have that particular information. Instead we tried, as we've been trained, to hear the question *behind* the question that the child is asking. After providing a sensitive-listening moment in which Dash and Mikey could expand on this, we discovered that the real question behind the question also had to do with the loudest-decibel burp. Turning to Gus, age twelve, we let him offer some guidance, which he kind of did, by asking if we knew that somebody once made a replica of the "Mona Lisa" entirely out of burnt toast.

I have changed all the children's names in order to protect their privacy. That is, after ill-advisedly using their actual names in this article, I have changed their names in real life. Their well-being must always come first. Sitting down to talk with them has become a weekly ritual, which they seem to value highly even though it drove Marjorie insane several months ago and she ran off with an events planner who has no children. Well-meaning friends say that perhaps what we talked about should not have been talked about to begin with. That is nonsense. You have to talk about it, as an overwhelming percentage of Americans agree. The only mistake bigger than not talking about it is talking about it (or anything else) without first sitting down. ♦

FIXING BROKEN WINDOWS

Bill Bratton wants to be America's top cop. His critics say that his legacy is tainted.

BY KEN AULETTA



On a bitterly cold night in February, William Bratton, New York City's police commissioner, joined several hundred uniformed officers for an informal memorial service at the corner of 107th Avenue and Inwood Street, in Jamaica, Queens. It was past midnight, and everyone was waiting for Mayor Bill de Blasio, who was due to speak. Twenty-seven years earlier, on February 26, 1988, a twenty-two-year-old officer named Edward Byrne was shot and killed on that corner, on orders from a drug dealer, as he sat in his patrol car guarding the home of a witness. The memorial is an annual rite for many city cops, and is a reminder of how much tougher New

York's streets were at the time of the murder. That year, there were eighteen hundred and ninety-six homicides in the city, many of them drug-related. In 2014, there were three hundred and twenty-eight, a record low. Byrne's death drew national headlines, and President Reagan phoned the Byrne family to offer his condolences.

Before the service, the Mayor's staff worried privately about how the officers would greet him. Under Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly, the use of stop-and-frisk—in which officers stop, question, and pat down someone if there is a “reasonable suspicion” that a crime has oc-

curred or might occur—became more frequent, and minority leaders were speaking out against the aggressive tactics of the N.Y.P.D. De Blasio, while campaigning for mayor, had called for more civilian oversight of the police, and vowed to crack down on “discriminatory” police practices. The comment did not sit well with many cops. “He ran an anti-police campaign,” Kelly told me recently. “He parsed the electorate. He did it very skillfully. He aimed at the fringes.”

In appointing Bratton, de Blasio hoped to reassure both the public and the police. Bratton, who is sixty-seven, served as New York's police commissioner from 1994 to 1996, under Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, and oversaw a sharp reduction in crime. From 2002 to 2009, when he was the chief of police in Los Angeles, violent crime there fell by fifty-four per cent. Bratton embraced both stop-and-frisk and broken-windows policing, the latter a strategy based on the idea, proposed in 1982 by the sociologists James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling, that cracking down on “quality of life” crimes and disorderly behavior—turnstile-jumping, squeegee men, public intoxication, aggressive panhandling—makes citizens feel safer and discourages more serious crime. In 2009, a Los Angeles *Times* poll showed that eight of ten voters, including seventy-six per cent of Latinos and sixty-eight per cent of blacks, approved of the L.A.P.D.'s performance.

Upon returning to New York, Bratton confronted a police force that had serious issues. A survey of seventeen thousand city residents, ordered by Bratton and conducted in May and June of 2014, found that forty-one per cent of blacks and thirty-one per cent of Hispanics held a somewhat negative or very negative view of the police, compared with just seventeen per cent of whites. A second survey, involving a third of the city's force of thirty-five thousand officers, revealed that seventy per cent of them lacked confidence that their decisions “would be backed by the department.” Three-quarters of white cops said that they expected fair treatment from their supervisors, but only a third of black officers and half of Latino officers felt that way. Before hiring Bratton, de Blasio called the two former mayors of Los Angeles whom Bratton had worked for, and both assured him that Bratton believed that communities and

Of broken-windows policing, Bratton said, “I rely on what my eyes show me.”

the police must work together to combat crime. Bratton “understood that policing had to be community-focussed and constitutional,” the former Los Angeles mayor Antonio Villaraigosa told me. Bratton helped convince de Blasio that broken-windows policing was effective, but he also agreed that the N.Y.P.D.’s use of stop-and-frisk was excessive.

Then, in July of 2014, came the death of Eric Garner, a forty-three-year-old black man arrested on Staten Island for illegally selling loose cigarettes—a classic broken-windows offense. According to the medical examiner, Garner died after being put in a choke hold by police, who were trying to restrain him, but no officer was indicted; a federal investigation is still under way. (On July 13th, the city agreed to pay the Garner family \$5.9 million to settle a wrongful-death lawsuit.) The following month, in Ferguson, Missouri, Michael Brown, an unarmed eighteen-year-old black man, was shot and killed after an encounter with a white officer. That officer, too, was not indicted by a grand jury, and protests erupted in New York and other cities. In a press conference, de Blasio, who has a biracial son, admitted that he and his wife have “had to literally train” him in “how to take special care in any encounter he has with the police officers who are there to protect him.” Patrick Lynch, the president of the Patrolmen’s Benevolent Association, complained to the press that de Blasio had thrown cops “under the bus.” Then, in December, a mentally ill man shot and killed two officers as they sat in their patrol car in Brooklyn, after which he killed himself. Lynch declared that de Blasio had “blood on the hands,” and, when the Mayor met with grieving family members, a wall of police officers turned their backs on him.

Recently, Bratton defended de Blasio’s remarks about his son: “Every black I’ve ever dealt with tells me that they tell their kids the same thing. Don’t you as a white parent tell your kids certain things when they’re going out driving?” He added, “Not being black, how do we put ourselves into his shoes?”

At the memorial service in Queens, de Blasio, who is six feet five, towered over Bratton, who is five-ten. He wore a blue police windbreaker with the word “MAYOR” emblazoned in yellow across the back. With his hands clasped in front,

he followed and seemed to defer to Bratton, who introduced him to members of the Byrne family. Patrick Lynch was there but did not offer to shake hands, and de Blasio avoided eye contact. Bratton addressed the crowd, saying of Byrne, “His life, his sacrifice, began a change in this city.” He talked about the unity of the N.Y.P.D. “family,” a word that was mentioned several times that night. The Mayor then spoke, and concluded, tepidly, “Tonight, it’s so important just to remember a good young man, a good young man who represented all that we aspire to be.” Afterward, a senior police official whispered to me, “He’s passionate about pre-K. I guess he’s not passionate about cops.”

Not long ago, I joined Bratton in his black S.U.V., as he was being driven to a farewell reception for the retiring commander of Brooklyn South, at the Sixty-seventh Precinct, in East Flatbush. He told me that the winter and early spring had been “the most trying period of time for me in my whole career. If you look at the turbulence, not only in the city but the country, you had attacks on the police, you had anti-police momentum being generated by Washington and Eric Holder”—the Attorney General, who in March declared that the people of Ferguson feel “under siege” from the police. “And, at the same time, police were saying, ‘This is crazy. We are saving America.’”

On most days, Bratton can be found in his office, on the fourteenth floor of One Police Plaza, a short walk from City Hall. Tall windows offer grand views of the East River and the Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Williamsburg Bridges. A portrait of Teddy Roosevelt—the police commissioner from 1895 to 1897—faces Bratton’s wooden desk, which, he proudly notes, was once Roosevelt’s. When I visited, Bratton was wearing a blue custom-tailored pinstriped suit, a tightly knotted Hermès tie, a crisp white shirt, and polished black shoes; his thinning gray hair was carefully combed. When he receives visitors, he sits in a leather armchair. Behind him is a shrine to Jack Maple, a friend and former deputy commissioner who died, of cancer, in 2001. A carved puppet likeness of Maple sits on a credenza and is dressed, as Maple often was, in a blue double-breasted blazer with four gold buttons. Bratton once said, “Jack is the

smartest man I’ve ever met on crime.”

Bratton was raised in a working-class Catholic household in Dorchester, Massachusetts, and as a child he dreamed of being a cop. In 1966, at nineteen and unable to afford college, he enlisted in the Army and served as a military policeman in Vietnam. When he returned home, he was offended by the protests and the social unrest. “I believed in order and conformity and the need for everyone to abide by social norms,” he wrote in an autobiography, “Turnaround: How America’s Top Cop Reversed the Crime Epidemic,” published in 1998. In 1970, at twenty-three, he joined the Boston police force, and by 1980, after graduating from Boston State College, he had risen to executive superintendent, the second-ranking official—in a department where the average cop didn’t become a sergeant until the age of fifty. The mayor’s press office encouraged him to let the magazine *Boston* do a profile of him. It put his ambitious side on display. When the reporter asked about his future, Bratton responded, “My personal goal is to become commissioner. Be it one year, or four years, that’s what I want.”

The commissioner soon exiled him to a district office, and Bratton left the department to become chief of police for the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, and then the superintendent of Boston’s Metropolitan District Commission Police. In 1990, Robert Wasserman, who had worked with Bratton in Boston, and was a consultant to the New York Transit Authority, successfully pushed for Bratton to be appointed head of the four-thousand-member New York Transit Police. The city was in the grip of the crack epidemic, and the violent-crime rate was at a peak: that year, there were more than twenty-two hundred murders and more than a hundred thousand robberies. In the Transit Police job, Bratton met Maple, a tough-talking lieutenant whom he promoted to be his special assistant. Within two years, subway felonies declined twenty-seven per cent and robberies by a third. Fare evasion, which typically means turnstile-jumping, and which, according to Bratton’s book, deprived the city of eighty million dollars annually, was reduced by half.

In 1992, he rejoined the Boston police department and soon became its commissioner, and in 1994 he was hired for

the top post at the N.Y.P.D., replacing Ray Kelly. He assembled a team made up of several former colleagues, including Maple and Wasserman, and took on the city's staggering crime rate. Led by Maple, the deputy commissioner of crime-control strategies, the N.Y.P.D. established a computerized system called CompStat, which has evolved into a tool that, among other things, can identify and track the hard-core criminals who commit a disproportionate percentage of crimes in the city. Between 1993 and 1995, felony crimes fell by nearly forty per cent. Some credit goes to Giuliani's predecessor as mayor, David Dinkins, who added six thousand officers to a police force that eventually grew to nearly forty-one thousand, and saw crime decline, on average, six per cent annually in the last years of his administration. With Bratton as commissioner, the annual decline more than doubled.

The press celebrated Bratton, which angered Giuliani, who eventually drove him out. In April of 1996, Bratton was recruited to work in New York for a Boston private-security firm, and for the next six years he worked as a corporate executive in the security business. Then, in 2002, he became L.A.'s chief of police. The city was still recovering from the arrest and beating of Rodney King, in 1991, and the police there faced "charges of excessive force, false arrests, and unreasonable searches and seizures," Bratton said. "It was an opportunity to reform and reshape the department."

In 2009, Bratton returned to New York to run a large private-security firm. At the time, the N.Y.P.D. relied heavily on stop-and-frisk. In 2011, there were nearly seven hundred thousand stop-and-frisk incidents in New York, ninety-one per cent of them involving citizens of color. Fully half of the stop-and-frisks were based on "furtive movements," a vague category that can be easily abused if an officer is uncomfortable around people of color. By the end of 2013, Kelly, facing public pressure, had reduced the number to less than two hundred thousand, and in 2014, after a federal judge called for changes to the practice on the ground that it violated the Fourth Amendment, Bratton brought it down to fifty thousand. Despite many fewer stop-and-frisks, the crime rate remained low.

"The No. 1 issue we heard over and

over again was that the black community—rich, poor, middle class—was concerned about this issue," Bratton told me. "The commissioner, whom they liked quite a bit, and Mayor Bloomberg, who polled well for a long time, just weren't listening. They were kind of tone-deaf to this issue. So we worked really hard, myself and Mayor de Blasio, to respond." When I mentioned this to Ray Kelly, he fumed. "That was not the feeling of much of the communities of color," he said. "It



was the view of activists. I'm telling him, he's wrong." He defended stop-and-frisk as an essential crime-fighting tool, noting that the police department had twenty-three million citizen contacts and answered twelve million calls per year. He emphasized that there was perhaps "one frisk every two weeks per patrol officer. Nobody ever puts that in proportion."

CompStat continues to be central to the N.Y.P.D.'s operation, and the model has spread to other cities. The CompStat meeting is held every Thursday morning, from 8 A.M. to noon, in the cavernous Jack Maple Room, on the eighth floor of Police Headquarters. A rotating group of officers from the five boroughs takes part, and sometimes Bratton attends. On the day I sat in, the officers were discussing the recurrent problem of neighborhood gangs. In the Sixty-seventh Precinct, for example, they have identified two hundred and eighty-seven gang members, who were responsible for the majority of the felonies in the district.

"Police departments all over the country use CompStat," Jeffrey Fagan, a prominent criminologist and a law professor at Columbia University, told me. "They're looking to see where the crimes are happening and what to do about it. So Bratton gets credit for starting CompStat and for allocating cops. That's a very good thing."

Bratton's embrace of broken-windows policing is more controversial. He cred-

its it with playing an important role in reducing crime in New York, Boston, and L.A. And the most recent F.B.I. data, from 2013, show that, of the nation's twenty-five largest cities, New York has the lowest rate of major felonies. Detroit's murder rate is ten times New York's, and Philadelphia's and Chicago's are three times as high. In his autobiography, Bratton notes that when he ran the Transit Police, in the early nineties, one out of seven people stopped for fare-beating had an outstanding warrant, and one in twenty-one was found to be carrying a weapon.

"More than any other factor, what caused this amazing change was Broken Windows, or quality-of-life policing," Bratton wrote in a department report in April. He told me, "In the early nineteen-nineties, we were losing tourists because of the awful crime numbers we had." Today, he said, most New Yorkers "feel safe. Just look at the sheer volume of people riding the subways at night." Broken-windows, he says, "is about quality of life, about freedom from fear, about freedom from disturbance." Minor crimes—patronizing a prostitute or a drug dealer—had been ignored because they were seen as victimless. "What was not understood was that the victim was the neighborhood."

Bratton is at pains to emphasize that broken-windows policing is not stop-and-frisk. With stop-and-frisk, he said, "an officer has a reasonable suspicion that a crime is committed, is about to be committed, or has been committed. Quality-of-life policing is based on probable cause—an officer has witnessed a crime personally, or has a witness to the crime. It's far different." The difference is irrelevant to many critics, who see an approach that presumes guilt and unfairly targets minorities. Broken-windows theory and stop-and-frisk "have the same ideology," Josmar Trujillo, a co-founder of New Yorkers Against Bratton and a member of the Coalition to End Broken Windows, told me. Trujillo added that he'd happily see the N.Y.P.D.'s force reduced by half. "We live in a place where police are constantly in our lives, acting as if they expect crime."

Joo-Hyun Kang, the director of Communities United for Police Reform, a citywide umbrella group comprising dozens of organizations, said that, at least anecdotally, far more summonses are issued to people "in Bedford-Stuyvesant



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who may be on their stoop enjoying a can of beer” than to, say, picnickers in Central Park sharing a bottle of champagne. Broken-windows invites “the N.Y.P.D. to go on a fishing expedition,” Kang said. “It’s basically racial profiling for people under the assumption that they have outstanding warrants.”

Bratton argues that many broken-windows arrests are prompted by 911 and 311 calls from citizens, most of whom complain about misdemeanors, such as traffic offenses, public intoxication, urinating in public, drug use, disorderly youths, and street noise. Vanessa Gibson, who chairs the City Council’s Committee on Public Safety, and whose district includes part of the South Bronx, said that she is more open to broken-windows. “I was of the mind-set that police basically patrolled neighborhoods, stopped when they saw young people on a corner, and started asking questions when they saw suspicious activity,” she said. “I didn’t understand, as I do now, that police are responding to 911 and 311 calls.”

Bratton also notes that most violent crimes take place in minority neighborhoods. In 2014, ninety-eight per cent of the suspects in shootings were black or Hispanic, and seventy-six per cent of rape victims, seventy-one per cent of robbery victims, and seventy-one per cent of assault victims were people of color. Between eighty and ninety per cent of citizens support the broken-windows strategy, he said. A Quinnipiac University poll released in May found that, when black voters were asked if they generally supported broken-windows, sixty-one per cent said they did. But, when the same citizens were asked if they approved or disapproved of the way the New York City police were doing their job, fifty per cent of blacks and forty-one per cent of Hispanics disapproved, whereas just twenty per cent of white voters disapproved.

Eric Adams, the Brooklyn borough president, who retired from the N.Y.P.D. as a captain in 2006, explained the contradiction. Adams said that he supports broken-windows but that “there has been a systemic problem, because of twenty years of aggressive, unequal enforcement.” Under Mayors Giuliani and Bloomberg, officers felt encouraged, he said, to “make as many contacts as possible with people based on their race and ethnicity and where they live. These con-

tacts were done through stop-and-frisk” and misdemeanor arrests. Adams went on, “It was about instilling fear in people. It has started to change, but it’s like moving an ocean liner.”

Critics say, however, that broken-windows is not nearly as successful as it claims to be. The crime rate in New York fell in the nineteen-nineties—but it also fell in San Diego, Houston, Dallas, and other cities that were not using the same strategy. “There’s no good scientific evidence that broken-windows works or has much to do with crime,” Fagan said. “And the few claims for it that people try to make have been contested. None of them stand up to really close examination. So what’s left? Bratton can say all he wants that broken-windows works, and he can look at large correlations between misdemeanor arrests and declines in crime, but there’s no plausible connection between the two. Marijuana smokers are not criminals on their day off.”

Bratton conceded, “You’re not going to find the scientific study that can support broken-windows one way or the other.” He added, “The evidence I rely on is what my eyes show me,” and he pointed to “the reduction of fear” that he sees in rejuvenated neighborhoods like Times Square. Ekow N. Yankah, a legal scholar at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, notes that Times Square benefitted from several changes, including the city’s willingness to invest in the area and to change zoning laws that shut down the sex industry. “I’m not saying policing was not a part of it, but if I have a view it has to be tested. I have no doubt that Bratton has the best interests of New York at heart. But I think he sees what he wants to see.”

One day recently in a courtroom at Manhattan’s Criminal Court Building, at 100 Centre Street, thirty-one defendants who had been arrested for misdemeanors appeared before the judge. Only one was white—a homeless man. Two of the defendants had been apprehended the day before as trespassers for using a Port Authority bathroom that the police said required that they show a bus ticket. “They threw me against the wall, completely searched me, patted and frisked me in front of all these people, and threw cuffs on me,” Wendell Moore, a thirty-two-year-old man and a father of seven children, told me. The police found a cell

phone on him that they claimed was not his. He spent the night in jail, and the next day was charged and released. “Other people going to that bathroom they didn’t stop,” Moore said. “They only stopped two black kids. They didn’t know who had tickets.”

Ed McCarthy, a longtime Legal Aid attorney, told me that broken-windows arrests have a way of steering people into the criminal-justice system. Clients who are younger than Moore often plead guilty, he said, because the alternative is worse: “You have a kid who’s nineteen, twenty years of age. He’s no longer eligible for youthful-offender status. He’s now jumped a turnstile for the third or fourth time, and the D.A.’s policy is ‘No, he’s had his chance. He’s going to be arrested or stay in jail because he’s had a couple of warrants.’ And, of course, if you’re nineteen and the choice is plead guilty, get a record, and go home, or risk going into Rikers for four or five days or even longer, what would you do? You obviously are going to plead guilty.” A criminal record of any kind can prevent a person from getting a job. And, because broken-windows singles out “recidivists,” convictions can quickly accumulate.

Donna Lieberman, the executive director of the New York branch of the A.C.L.U., said of Bratton’s defense of broken-windows, “There is insufficient concern that a generation of young people, particularly young men of color, have grown up thinking that their legal rights aren’t worth anything, that their dignity isn’t worth anything, that their freedom isn’t worth anything.” She went on, “That’s a huge omission. It doesn’t speak of racial animus. It speaks of a race-bound kind of tunnel vision about how we look at social policy and at policing policy in particular.”

In April, de Blasio again expressed support for the broken-windows approach. “I want to emphasize, my vision of quality-of-life policing and my vision related to the broken-windows strategy is the same as Commissioner Bratton’s,” he said. But many left-leaning activists struggle to understand his reasoning. “De Blasio can’t credibly present himself as a progressive dedicated to equality when broken-windows is both a violation of human rights and a ‘Tale of Two Cities’ writ large,” Robert Gangi, the director of the Police Reform Organizing Project, and a longtime critic of broken-windows,

A THRESHOLD

Where have you gone, my little saving grace?
Iona or Iola of the laugh
like falling silver . . . Now nothing's in its place,
and all's as light and cold as that blue scarf
I lost or left without, or I don't own.
Everything shames me. Every card declined.
You slid between the stalls and you were gone
though I scoured the field for hours, hoping to find
you sat with "the silent children of the fair"
or some such nonsense, though I always knew
you'd taken another hand, the way kids do,
not looking up. This place again. It's where
I wake up and recall I have no daughter
or fall asleep and dream I have no daughter.

—Don Paterson

told me. Melissa Mark-Viverito, the City Council speaker, has called for low-level offenses such as public urination and turnstile-jumping to be decriminalized. Bratton has opposed such efforts. However, last November, the police department reduced the penalty for the possession of small amounts of marijuana from an arrest to a summons.

In August of last year, Bratton publicly conceded that the video showing the choke hold that led to the death of Eric Garner was "certainly disturbing." And although Bratton maintains that community policing has always been central to his work, his closest advisers have acknowledged the need to adjust the department's policing strategies. "The police environment has changed," Robert Wasserman says. In 1994, when Bratton began his first tenure as N.Y.P.D. commissioner, crime was rampant, and the issues that he addressed revolved around what Wasserman called "policing solutions," and consulting the community was not the highest priority. Today, Wasserman added, Bratton has to overcome the community's "sense that cops only want to arrest people." Jeffrey Fagan, of Columbia, told me, "When people aren't in love with the police, they don't help the police, they don't cooperate with the police. Communities are the experts on crime, not the police; they know who the bad guys are."

"One of the biggest challenges facing me now," Bratton said, "is to continue to advocate for, and continue to implement,

broken-windows, quality-of-life policing, because I think it's essential to how the city feels about itself, and it has an impact on over-all crime. We should not make the mistake of my predecessor on the stop-question-and-frisk issue. We have to insure that the amount of it is appropriate to the issues that we're facing, and be sure that it's being done constitutionally, and that it's being done compassionately, and by that I mean respectfully."

Bratton often says that the police are "sales reps" and citizens are "customers." At a buffet breakfast at the Greater Allen African Methodist Episcopal Church, in Jamaica, Queens, last February, he told the audience that the N.Y.P.D. "needs to face the hard truth that in our most vulnerable neighborhoods we have a problem with citizen satisfaction. We are often abrupt, sometimes rude, and that's unacceptable." Subsequently, Bratton told me, "We want cops to be able to see the people they're policing. In this department, and maybe in a lot of American policing today, unfortunately, too many members don't treat people appropriately."

In late June, in an effort to improve customer service, Bratton unveiled a new neighborhood-policing plan called "One City: Safe and Fair—Everywhere," which assigns the same officers to the same areas (rather than shifting them around) and has them spend a third of their shifts on foot, talking with residents, merchants, and community leaders. Since

January, all officers are required to take a three-day training course each year, one day of which has been devoted to "Smart Policing," which aims to improve how the police interact with citizens.

At 7 A.M. on a Wednesday in June, I joined a hundred or so officers from the South Bronx's Forty-fourth Precinct in a classroom at the Police Academy, in College Point, Queens, for a daylong tutorial on empathy and discretion. Detective Ricky Taggart, a thirty-year veteran of the N.Y.P.D.—jacketless, gun on hip, rose-colored suspenders over a midnight-blue shirt—paced back and forth at the front of the room. In a booming voice, Taggart told the assembled officers that the N.Y.P.D. does "a great job," but "we can do better." The day's lesson was meant to be a "skill enhancer," focussing on improving the officers' interpersonal skills. In the course of the day, they were cautioned to listen, be patient, and control their emotions and anger. "If an irate citizen starts yelling at you, don't take it as a personal attack," he said.

After lunch in the cafeteria, the officers reassembled for a presentation by Moise Tingué, a sergeant who has been on the force for twenty-three years. Tingué dimmed the lights, and on a large screen behind him the words "What Is Winning?" appeared, introducing a PowerPoint presentation. Tingué said, "Winning is gaining voluntary compliance"—an officer can stop to listen to a suspect's explanation or ask him to comply, rather than immediately issuing a summons or reaching for his handcuffs. He showed videos of officers using excessive force—bashing young protesters on the Lower East Side, trying to control a demonstration on the Brooklyn Bridge. Then he highlighted an officer who'd been punched but, instead of lashing out at other, nonviolent demonstrators, and provoking a melee, calmly stayed in position.

The officers in the room, who ranged in age from early twenties to late fifties and in rank from rookie to precinct commander, were serious and attentive. The mood brightened when Taggart returned and displayed the opening screen of another PowerPoint presentation: "Controlling Language: Do We Have to Curse?" He played a clip of Dustin Hoffman, in "Midnight Cowboy," cursing, and of Robert De Niro, in "Taxi Driver," swearing constantly. As a counterpoint,



Taggart then played an audio clip of Captain Chesley Sullenberger III, the U.S. Airways pilot who, in 2009, landed his Airbus A320 in the Hudson River after a flock of geese flew into the engines and disabled them. Not once did Sullenberger curse or raise his voice, Taggart noted. He offered some suggestions. Instead of shouting “Fuck you!” or “Shut the fuck up!,” the officers could try alternatives, like “Stop mucking around!” or “Move the car, my friend.” The officers burst into laughter. “Remember, ladies and gentlemen, we’re the professionals,” Taggart said. “The people out there are our customers.”

Bratton has no illusions that a three-day-a-year class is an antidote for insensitivity or for the biases that afflict some officers in New York and other cities. Still, he noted, most of the complaints that citizens have about the police “are about language: ‘An officer swore at me.’ ‘He treated me disrespectfully.’” Bratton went on, “A lot of the training that we’re doing with our officers” is centered “on an officer’s approach to people and treating them respectfully. To see if we can get rid of the F-word. We joke that if we got rid of three, four words from a cop’s vocabulary we’d solve half the problem.”

There are deep fissures within the N.Y.P.D. During the past decade, the department has failed to raise the number of black cops above sixteen per cent, in a city where blacks make up twenty-three per cent of the population. In June, black trainees were just ten per

cent of the Police Academy’s graduating class. First Deputy Commissioner Ben B. Tucker places the blame for the problem, in part, on the fact that black candidates have a higher percentage of quality-of-life violations on their record, so they don’t get a second look. (The N.Y.P.D. says it is changing this process.) A bigger reason, he believes, is that many young blacks don’t aspire to be cops “because of how they were treated” by them. “We’re not user-friendly.”

In his office late one afternoon, Bratton told me, “You’ve got the historical issue of the tension between the black population and the police.” In Los Angeles, he commissioned a study to determine why the L.A.P.D. was having a hard time recruiting black officers. The main factor, he said, was “mothers, sisters, girlfriends, who for years had seen their men being disrespected by the police. And in L.A. there was a practice of putting people down, kneeling on the sidewalk, hands behind their head. ‘Why do you want to join an organization that’s been so disrespectful of you?’ So the profession was not one that was honored in the black community.” Bratton added, “Here, right now, we’ve got several factors at work,” including, “in recent times, the Trayvon Martin and the Garner incidents, and the incident in Missouri.”

Creating a force of more empathetic cops requires more than diversifying its composition. It’s also a matter of changing the way officers view their jobs. Stephen P. Davis, a retired police captain who worked with Bratton in New York in the

nineties, and who now works for him as deputy commissioner of public information, said, “We never looked at ourselves as a social agency.” Doing so, he added, would mean that “we are not really law-enforcement officers. It means we are public-safety officers. Cops don’t like that. They feel it makes them like social workers.” Ekow Yankah, of Cardozo, says that changing the police culture requires a more dramatic approach, starting with “whom we recruit to be police officers.” He approves of Bratton’s efforts to train cops “to have a different attitude,” but says that it’s also essential to “find the person who enjoys wielding power and weed him out.”

Whatever Bratton does, he’ll have to contend with the P.B.A. president, Patrick Lynch, who staunchly defends individual officers even when they are accused of abuse. Lynch and his staff of a hundred occupy the eleventh floor of 125 Broad Street, at the tip of Manhattan. Lynch, who is fifty-one, was first elected president of the twenty-three-thousand-member union at the age of thirty-five. He told me that he supports Bratton’s initiative to subject all cops to three extra days of training annually and conceded that officers “need training on how to bring someone to the ground who is resisting arrest.”

Lynch can sound reasonable, but he can quickly turn bellicose. Before he was reelected, in June, the P.B.A. Web site attacked his critics within the organization as “traitors to the union” who “played right into the hands of our liberal, cop-hating Mayor.” This spring, Lynch told me that cops have “the worst relations” with City Hall in three decades, because they lack de Blasio’s support. “We feel we get it from the police commissioner’s office. But when it comes from City Hall it feels like a throwaway line, like he really doesn’t believe what he’s saying.” I asked Lynch about his “blood on the hands” remark regarding de Blasio. “Those were the words and feelings of members,” he said. The demonstrations and the Mayor’s words created an environment that “led to the assassination of two police officers.” Of the gunman who killed the two officers in December, he said, “Why did he travel to New York? The answer is that the atmosphere here was fertile.”

Bratton believes that Lynch has failed to credit de Blasio for giving the department things that support police officers, including bulletproof vests that are more

protective and thirty per cent lighter, as well as a smartphone for every officer and tablets for sixty-five hundred patrol cars, giving officers quick access to data and reducing the amount of paperwork. Still, the P.B.A. has gone without a new contract since 2010. This past spring, Melissa Mark-Viverito, the City Council speaker, and Letitia James, the city's public advocate, among others, called for the Mayor to add a thousand cops, a request that fell short of Lynch's request for an increase of seven thousand. De Blasio opposed adding more officers, but Bratton, without specifying a number, publicly declared that the department needed them.

The Polo Bar, Ralph Lauren's new restaurant, off Fifth Avenue, is a difficult reservation to secure, but, on a week night in late March, Bratton and his wife, Rikki Klieman, a legal analyst for CBS News and a former criminal-defense attorney, were sitting in a choice banquet along the wall. "This is the new 'in' spot for the one-per-centers," Bratton said, with a chuckle. They greeted Dylan Lauren, Ralph's daughter, and the WNBC-TV anchor Chuck Scarborough and his wife, Ellen, who are friends of the couple in the Hamptons. Then Bratton pointed out his two favorite items on the menu: the rib-eye steak from Ralph Lauren's Colorado ranch and the corned-beef sandwich.

While running for mayor, de Blasio exhorted rich New Yorkers to cede more of their income to "the other New York." As a result, Bratton said, "one-per-centers have a significant dislike" of de Blasio, but he added that "they have a hard time pointing to anything negative he's done since he's been elected." He praised de Blasio's introduction of universal pre-K education, his support for affordable housing, and his maintenance of a vibrant economy. As for policing, he said, "There's nothing we've disagreed on in the months I've worked for him. He's done more for the police than any mayor I've served in thirty years."

Bratton has a two-hour meeting with the Mayor every week, and they talk regularly. "His temperament is very much like mine," he said. "I'm like this"—he held two steady hands horizontally over his charred rib eye. "Even in the midst of all the demonstrations and craziness in December and January, there was no screaming, no demanding. He's a very

collaborative individual." John Miller, the deputy commissioner for intelligence and counterterrorism, and Bratton's confidant, told me that, in contrast to Giuliani, "Mayor de Blasio is very comfortable conducting an orchestra. Giuliani was a soloist. He didn't like any instruments to play too loud." De Blasio declined to be interviewed, but Anthony E. Shorris, the first deputy mayor, told me, "I've never seen anybody have a bad moment face to face, even on a staff level."

So far, de Blasio's need to appear pro-police seems to work in Bratton's favor. On June 22nd, the Mayor announced that he had agreed to add thirteen hundred cops to the force—three hundred more than the number sought by Mark-Viverito. The next day, Bratton invited minority ministers from around the city to an Urban Ministers Symposium, in the gymnasium-like auditorium of Police Headquarters, where they were briefed on what the department is doing to improve community relations, and were asked for their help in preventing crime and in recruiting more black cops. De Blasio wasn't scheduled to appear, but he came, he said, because "the commissioner told me of this extraordinary gathering." He extolled New York as "the safest big city in America" and praised the "profound reforms under way" in the N.Y.P.D. For months, he had flatly insisted that no new cops would be added to the department; now he suggested that he had always been in favor of enlarging the force to support Bratton's efforts to improve neighborhood policing.

At a press conference afterward, a reporter asked Bratton what role he had played in securing the added cops. He conceded that the over-all total, thirteen hundred, was "not a number that was just pulled out of the sky—this was a very specific, detailed number," and one that his staff had privately recommended to the Mayor after a careful analysis.

Another reporter asked how, if crime is so low, Bratton convinced the Mayor that the city needs more officers. Bratton replied that there are more 911 and 311 calls, more danger from terrorists, a million more residents than in the nineteen-nineties, and more tourists. The city was

growing, "and the police department had not been." He said that the workforce increase would bolster the experimental community-policing program. Shorris told me that "there was no rationale" for adding more officers in order to fight crime, since New York "is the safest major city in the U.S. But the argument that found a sympathetic ear with the Mayor was a much more profound question about how to change policing."

During the press conference, however, when I asked Bratton about his commitment to broken-windows, he said, "Quality-of-life policing is not going away. Not so long as I'm commissioner, and I don't think so long as Mayor de Blasio is mayor. He understands it. He believes in it. We are committed to it. But we are committed to doing it in a way that, unlike unfortunately what happened with stop-question-and-frisk—we will continue to try and do it in a way that is not alienating but, rather, gaining support for what we do."

Ekow Yankah told me, "I actually think this is sad, in a way. Bratton is a complicated guy. He strikes me in some ways as deeply caring that police do better both for police officers and for citizens. So I don't think he's some awful bogeyman." But, he said, "no matter how much good he does, I think the legacy of broken-windows will be a huge scar. Because otherwise he'd have a chance of having a tremendous legacy."

At the Polo Bar, I asked Bratton if he had given any thought to his legacy. He had, of course: "That I will once again accomplish what I set out to do many years ago and become the most significant person in policing in the country. I think I achieved that in the nineties." Klieman exclaimed, "And the boys are back." She meant his longtime colleagues and advisers, including John Miller, Stephen Davis, Robert Wasserman, and the sociologist George Kelling.

"If you look at the characters around me, the only one missing is Jack," Bratton said, referring to Maple. "Everybody wanted to get back on the stage one last time, because we all miss it. We all want to be part of a great thing. We had it in '94. We have it now." ♦



THE WITCHES OF SALEM

Diabolical doings in a Puritan village.

BY STACY SCHIFF

In 1692, the Massachusetts Bay Colony executed fourteen women, five men, and two dogs for witchcraft. The sorcery materialized in January. The first hanging took place in June, the last in September; a stark, stunned silence followed. Although we will never know the exact number of those formally charged with having “wickedly, maliciously, and feloniously” engaged in sorcery, somewhere between a hundred and forty-four and a hundred and eighty-five witches and wizards were named in twenty-five villages and towns. The youngest was five; the eldest nearly eighty. Husbands implicated wives; nephews their aunts; daughters their mothers; siblings each other. One minister discovered that he was related to no fewer than twenty witches.

The population of New England at that time would fit into Yankee Stadium today. Nearly to a person, they were Puritans. Having suffered for their faith, they had sailed to North America to worship “with more purity and less peril than they could do in the country where they were,” as a clergyman at the center of the crisis later explained. On a providential mission, they hoped to begin history anew; they had the advantage of building a civilization from scratch. Like any oppressed people, they defined themselves by what offended them, which would give New England its gritty flavor and, it has been argued, America its independence.

New England delivered greater purity but also introduced fresh perils. Stretching from Martha’s Vineyard to Nova Scotia and incorporating parts of present-day Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Maine, it perched on the edge of a wilderness. That was a precarious position well before 1692, when the colony teetered between governments, or, more exactly, as a Boston merchant put it, “between government and no government.” The settlers unseated their royal governor in a deft 1689

military coup. They had endured without a charter for eight years.

From the start, the colonists tangled with that American staple, the swarthy terrorist in the back yard. Without a knock or a greeting, four armed Indians might appear in your parlor to warm themselves by the fire, propositioning you, while you cowered in the corner with your knitting. You could return from a trip to Boston to find your house in ashes and your family taken captive. The Indians skulked, they lurked, they flitted, they committed atrocities—and they vanished. “Our men could see no enemy to shoot at,” a Cambridge major general lamented.

King Philip’s War, a fifteen-month contest between the settlers and the Native Americans, had ended in 1676. It obliterated a third of New England’s towns, pulverized its economy, and claimed ten per cent of the adult male population. Every Bay Colony resident lost a friend or a relative; all knew of a dismemberment or an abduction. By 1692, another Indian war had begun to take shape, with a series of grisly raids by the Wabanaki and their French allies. The frontier had recently moved to within fifty miles of Salem.

From the pulpit came reminders of New England’s many depredations. The wilderness qualified as a sort of “devil’s den”; since the time of Moses, the prince of darkness had thrived there. He was hardly pleased to be displaced by a convoy of Puritans. He was in fact stark raving mad about it, preached Cotton Mather, the brilliant twenty-nine-year-old Boston minister. What, exactly, did an army of devils look like? Imagine “vast regiments of cruel and bloody French dragoons,” Mather instructed his North Church parishioners, and they would understand. He routinely muddled the zoological waters: Indians comported themselves like roaring lions or savage bears, Quakers like “grievous wolves.” The French, “dragons of the wilderness,”

completed the diabolical menagerie. Given the symbiotic relationship of an oppressed people and an inhospitable landscape, it was from there but a short step to a colluding axis of evil.

The men who catalogued those dangers—who could discern a line of Revelation in a hailstorm—protected against them, spiritually and politically. They assisted in coups and installed regimes. Where witches were concerned, they deferred to the Biblical injunction: “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live,” Exodus commands. The most literate men in Massachusetts in 1692 were also the most literal. Among them, few probed the subject of witchcraft as intently as did the lanky, light-haired Mather, who had entered Harvard at eleven and preached his first sermon at sixteen. He knew that the hidden world was there somewhere. He would relinquish no tool to exhibit it.

Mather shared the North Church pulpit with his illustrious father, Increase Mather. The president of Harvard, Increase was New England’s best-known and most prolific minister. (His son would eventually eclipse him on both counts, publishing four hundred and thirty-seven books, twenty-six of them in the next four years.) The elder Mather was returning from England that spring with a new charter. The fruit of three years’ negotiation, it promised at last to deliver Massachusetts from chaos. The colonists awaited it in jittery suspense; all manner of rumor circulated as to its terms. So unreliable was the news that a monarch could be dead one minute and alive the next.

In isolated settlements, in smoky, fire-lit homes, New Englanders lived very much in the dark, where one listens more acutely, feels most passionately, and imagines most vividly, where the sacred and the occult thrive. The seventeenth-century sky was crow black, pitch-black, Bible black, so black that it could be difficult



"Where will the Devil show most malice but where he is hated, and hateth most?" Cotton Mather wrote.

at night to keep to the path, so black that a line of trees might freely migrate to another location, or that you might find yourself pursued by a rabid black hog, leaving you to crawl home on all fours, bloody and disoriented. Even the colony's less isolated outposts felt their fragility. A tempest blew the roof off one of the finest homes in Salem as its ten occupants slept. A church went flying, with its congregation inside.

A visitor exaggerated when he reported that New Englanders could "neither drive a bargain, nor make a jest, without a text of Scripture at the end on it," but he was not far off. If there was a book in the house, it was the Bible. The early modern American thought, breathed, dreamed, disciplined, bartered, and hallucinated in Biblical texts and imagery. St. John the Baptist might well turn up in a land dispute. A prisoner cited Deuteronomy 19:19 in his own defense. When a killer cat came flying in your window—taking hold of your throat and crushing your chest as you lay defenseless in your bed—you scared it away by invoking the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. You also concluded that your irascible neighbor had paid a call, in feline form.

Human frailty was understood to account for inclement weather: teeth chattering, toes numb, the Massachusetts Puritan had every reason to believe that he sinned flamboyantly. He did so especially during the arctic winter of 1691, when bread froze on Communion plates, ink in pens, sap in the fireplace. In tiny Salem village, the Reverend Samuel Parris preached to a chorus of rattling coughs and sniffles, to the shuffling of cruelly frostbitten feet. For everyone's comfort, he curtailed his afternoon sermon of January 3, 1692. It was too cold to go on.

Weeks later, word got out that something was grievously wrong in the Parris household. The minister's eleven-year-old niece and nine-year-old daughter complained of bites and pinches by "invisible agents." Abigail and Betty launched into "foolish, ridiculous speeches." Their bodies shuddered and spun. They went limp or spasmodically rigid. They interrupted sermons and fell into trances. Neither appeared to have time for prayer,

though until January both had been perfectly well behaved and well mannered. At night they slept like babies.

In 1641, when the colonists established a legal code, the first capital crime was idolatry. The second was witchcraft. "If any man or woman be a witch, that is, has or consults with a familiar spirit, they shall be put to death," read the Massachusetts body of laws. Blasphemy came next, followed by murder, poisoning, and bestiality. In the years since, New England had indicted more than a hundred witches, about a quarter of them men. The first person to confess to having entered into a pact with



Satan, a Connecticut servant, had prayed for his help with her chores. An assistant materialized to clear the ashes from the hearth and the hogs from the fields. The servant was indicted in 1648 for "familiarity with the devil." Unable to resist a calamity, preternatural or otherwise, Cotton Mather disseminated an instructive account of her compact.

In 1688, four exemplary Boston children, the sons and daughters of a devout Boston stonemason named John Goodwin, suffered from a baffling disorder. "They would bark at one another like dogs, and again purr like so many cats," noted Mather, who observed Goodwin's family and wrote of their afflictions in "Memorable Providences, Relating to Witchcraft and Possessions" the following year. (The 1689 volume was a salute to his father's "Illustrious Providences," a grab bag of apparitions and portents, published five years earlier.) The Goodwin children flew like geese, on one occasion for twenty feet. They recoiled from blows of invisible sticks, shrieked that they were sliced by knives or wrapped in chains. Jaws, wrists, necks flew out of joint. Parental reproof sent the children into agonies. Chores defied them. But "nothing in the world would so discompose them as a religious exercise," Mather reported. Thirteen-year-old Martha could read an Oxford compendium of humor, although she seized up when handed a volume he deemed "profitable and edifying," or one with the name Mather on the cover.

To observe her symptoms more closely, Mather that summer took Martha Goodwin into his home. She cantered, trotted, and galloped about the household on her "aerial steed," whistling through family prayer and pummeling anyone who attempted it in her presence—the worst house guest in history. She hurled books at Mather's head. She read and reread his pages on her case, lampooning their author. The sauciness astonished him. "And she particularly told me," Mather sputtered, four years before the Salem trials, "that I should quickly come to disgrace by that history."

The cause of Martha's afflictions was identified soon enough. The witch was the mother of a neighborhood laundress. On the stand, the defendant was unable adequately to recite the Lord's Prayer, understood to be proof of guilt. She was hanged in November, 1688, on Boston Common.

Samuel Parris, the Salem minister, would have known every detail of the Goodwin family's trials from Mather's much reprinted "Memorable Providences." The book included the pages Martha wildly ridiculed. The "agitations, writhings, tumblings, tossings, wallowings, foamings" in the parsonage were the same, only more acute. The girls cried that they were being stabbed with fine needles. Their skin burned. One disappeared halfway down a well. Their shrieks could be heard from a distance.

Through February, Parris fasted and prayed. He consulted with fellow-clergymen. With cider and cakes, he and his wife entertained the well-wishers who crowded their home. They prayed ardently, gooseflesh rising on their arms. They sang Psalms. But when the minister had had enough of the "odd postures and antic gestures," the deranged speeches, when it became clear that Scripture would not relieve the girls' preternatural symptoms, Parris called in the doctors.

In 1692, a basic medical kit looked little different from an ancient Greek one, consisting as it did of beetle's blood, fox lung, and dried dolphin heart. In plasters or powders, snails figured in many remedies. Salem village had one practicing physician that winter. He owned nine medical texts; he could likely read but not write. His surgical arsenal consisted

of lances, razors, and saws. The doctor who had examined a seizing Groton girl a generation earlier initially diagnosed a stomach disorder. On a second visit, he refused to administer to her further. The distemper was diabolical in origin.

Whoever examined Abigail and Betty arrived at the same conclusion. "The evil hand" came as no surprise; the supernatural explanation was already the one on the street. The diagnosis likely terrified the girls, whose symptoms deteriorated. It may have gratified Reverend Parris. Witchcraft was portentous, a Puritan favorite. Never before had it broken out in a parsonage. The Devil's appearance was nearly a badge of honor, further proof that New Englanders were the chosen people. No wonder Massachusetts was troubled by witches, Cotton Mather exulted: "Where will the Devil show most malice but where he is hated, and hateth most?" The New England ministry had long been on the lookout for the apocalypse, imminent since the sixteen-fifties. The Book of Revelation predicted that the Devil would descend accompanied by "infernal fiends." If they were about, God could not be far behind.

Soon the twelve-year-old daughter of a close friend of Parris's began to shudder and choke. So did the village doctor's teen-age niece. A creature had followed her home from an errand, through the snow; she now realized that it had not been a wolf at all. The girls named names. They could see the culprits clearly. Not one but three witches were loose in Salem.

What exactly was a witch? Any seventeenth-century New Englander could have told you. As workers of magic, witches and wizards extend as far back as recorded history. The witch as Salem conceived her materialized in the thirteenth century, when sorcery and heresy moved closer together. She came into her own with the Inquisition, as a popular myth yielded to a popular madness. The western Alps introduced her to lurid orgies. Germany launched her into the air. As the magician molted into the witch, she also became predominately female, inherently more wicked and more susceptible to satanic overtures. An influential fifteenth-century text compressed a shelf

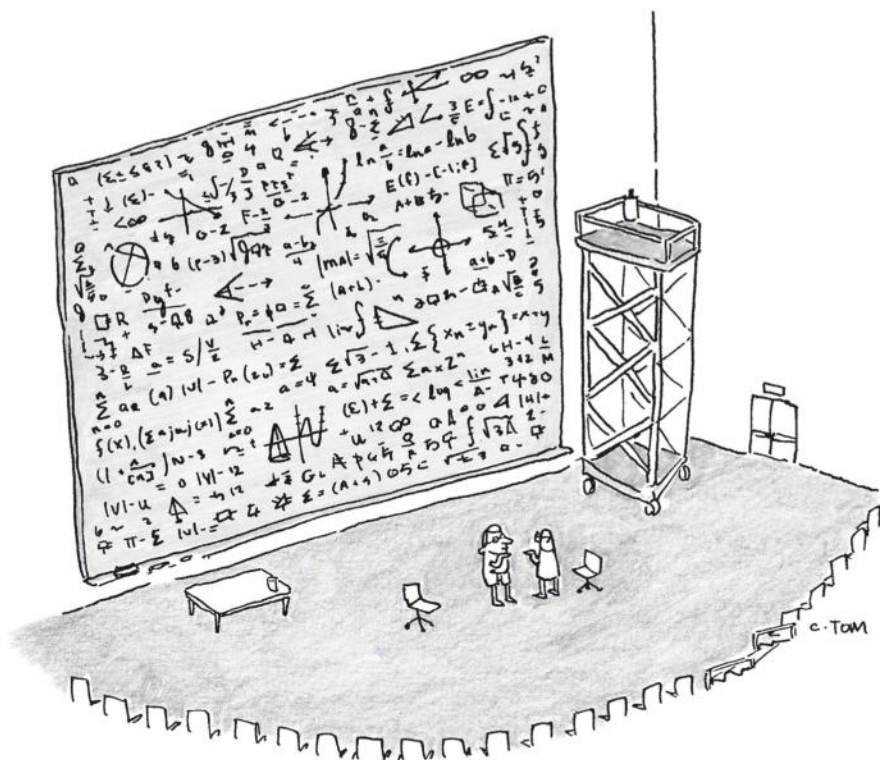
of classical sources to make its point: "When a woman thinks alone, she thinks evil." As is often the case with questions of women and power, elucidations here verged on the paranormal. Though weak willed, women could emerge as dangerously, insatiably commanding.

The English witch made the trip to North America largely intact. She signed her agreement with the Devil in blood, bore a mark on her body for her compact, and enchanted by way of charms, ointments, and poppets, doll-like effigies. Continental witches had more fun. They walked on their hands. They made pregnancies last for three years. They rode hyenas to bacchanals deep in the forest. They stole babies and penises. The Massachusetts witch disordered the barn and the kitchen. She seldom flew to illicit meetings, more common in Scandinavia and Scotland. Instead, she divined the contents of an unopened letter, spun suspiciously fine linen, survived falls down stairs, tipped hay from wagons, enchanted beer, or caused cattle to leap four feet off the ground. Witches could be muttering, contentious malcontents or inexplicably strong and unaccountably smart. They could commit the capital offense of having more wit than their neighbors, as a minister

said of the third Massachusetts woman hanged for witchcraft, in 1656.

Matters were murkier when it came to the wily figure with six thousand years of experience, the master of disguise who could cause things to appear and disappear, who knew your secrets and could make you believe things of yourself that were not true. He turned up in New England as a hybrid monkey, man, and rooster, or as a fast-moving turtle. Even Cotton Mather was unsure what language he spoke. He was a pervasive presence, however: the air pulsed with his minions. Typically in Massachusetts, he wore a high-crowned hat, as he had in an earlier Swedish invasion, which Mather documented in his 1689 book. Mather did not mention the brightly colored scarf that the Devil wound around his hat. Like the Swedish devil's gartered stockings or red beard, it never turned up in New England.

By May, 1692, eight Salem girls had claimed to be enchanted by individuals whom most of them had never met. Several served as visionaries; relatives of the ailing made pilgrimages to consult with them. They might be only eleven or twelve, but under adult supervision they could explain how



"The math is right. It's just in poor taste."

several head of cattle had frozen to death, several communities away, six years earlier. In the courtroom, they provided prophetic direction, cautioning that a suspect would soon topple a child, or cause a woman to levitate. Minutes later, the victim's feet rose from the floor. With their help, at least sixty witches had been deposed and jailed by the end of the month, more than the Massachusetts prisons had ever accommodated. Those who had frozen through the winter began to roast in the sweltering spring.

On May 27th, the new Massachusetts governor, Sir William Phips, established a special court to try the witchcraft cases. He assembled on the bench nine of the "people of the best prudence and figure that could be pitched upon." At its head he installed his lieutenant governor, sixty-year-old William Stoughton. A political shape-shifter, Stoughton had served in five prior Massachusetts regimes. He had helped to unseat the reviled royal governor, on whose council he sat and whose courts he headed. He possessed one of the finest legal minds in the colony.

The court met in early June, and sentenced the first witch to hang on the tenth. It also requested a bit of guidance. During the next days, twelve ministers conferred. Cotton Mather drafted their reply, a circumspect, eight-paragraph document, delivered mid-month. Acknowledging the enormity of the crisis, he issued a paean to good government. He urged "exquisite caution." He warned of the dangers posed to those "formerly of an unblemished reputation."

In the lines that surely received the greatest scrutiny, Mather reminded the justices that convictions should not rest purely on spectral evidence—evidence visible only to the enchanted, who conversed with the Devil or with his confederates. Mather would insist on the point throughout the summer. Other considerations must weigh against the suspected witch, "inasmuch as 'tis an undoubted and a notorious thing" that a devil might impersonate an innocent, even virtuous, man. Mather wondered whether the entire calamity might be resolved if the court discounted those testimonies. With a sweeping "nevertheless"—a word that figured in every 1692 Mather statement on witchcraft—he

then executed an about-face. Having advised "exquisite caution," he endorsed a "speedy and vigorous prosecution."

A month later, Ann Foster, a seventy-two-year-old widow from neighboring Andover, submitted to the first of several Salem interrogations. Initially, she denied all involvement with sorcery. Soon enough, she began to unspool a fantastical tale. The Devil had appeared to her as an exotic bird. He promised prosperity, along with the gift of afflicting at a glance. She had not seen him in six months, but her ill-tempered neighbor, Martha Carrier, had been in touch on his behalf.

At Carrier's direction, Foster had bewitched several children and a hog. She worked her sorcery with poppets. Carrier had announced a Devil's Sabbath in May, arranging their trip by air. There were twenty-five people in the meadow, where a former Salem village minister officiated. Three days later, from jail, Foster added a malfunctioning pole and a mishap to her account. The pole had snapped as the women flew, causing them to crash, Foster's leg crumpling beneath her.

She appeared entirely cooperative, both in a jail interview with a minister and before her interrogators. The justices soon learned that Foster had failed to come clean, however. It seemed that she and Carrier had neither flown nor crashed alone on that Salem-bound pole: a third rider had travelled silently behind Foster. So divulged forty-year-old Mary Lacey, a newly arrested suspect, on July 20th. Foster had also withheld the details of a chilling ceremony. The Devil had baptized his recruits, dipping their heads in water, six at a time. He performed the sacrament in a nearby river, to which he had carried Lacey in his arms. On July 21st, Ann Foster appeared before the magistrates for the fourth time. That hearing was particularly sensational: Mary Lacey, who supplied the details missing from Foster's account, was her daughter.

"Did not you know your daughter to be a witch?" one justice asked Foster. She did not, and seemed taken aback. Mary Warren, a pretty, twenty-year-old servant, helpfully chimed in, a less dramatic witness at Foster's hearing than she appeared on other occasions, when blood trickled from her mouth or spread across her bonnet. Warren shared with the court what a spectre had confided in her: Foster had

recruited her own daughter. The authorities understood that she had done so about thirteen years earlier. Was that correct? "No, and I know no more of my daughter's being a witch than what day I shall die upon," Foster replied, sounding as unequivocal as she had been on the details of the misbegotten Salem flight. A magistrate coaxed her: "You cannot expect peace of conscience without a free confession." Foster swore that if she knew anything more she would reveal it.

At this, Mary Lacey was called. She berated her mother: "We have forsaken Jesus Christ, and the Devil hath got hold of us. How shall we get clear of this evil one?" Under her breath, Foster began to pray. "What God do witches pray to?" a justice needed. "I cannot tell, the Lord help me," the befuddled old woman replied, as her daughter delivered fresh details of their flight to the village green and of the satanic baptism. Her mother, Lacey revealed, rode first on the stick.

Court officers removed the two older women and escorted Lacey's seventeen-year-old daughter, Mary Lacey, Jr., into the room. Mary Warren fell at once into fits. At first, the younger Lacey was unhelpful. "Where is my mother that made me a witch and I knew it not?" she cried, a yet more disturbing question than the one posed in June, when a suspect wondered whether she might be a witch and not know it. Asked to smile at Warren without hurting her, Mary Lacey failed. Warren collapsed to the floor. "Do you acknowledge now that you are a witch?" Lacey was asked. She could only agree, although she seemed to be working from a different definition: a recalcitrant child, she had caused her parents plenty of trouble. She had, she insisted, signed no diabolical pact.

The ideal Puritan girl was a sterling amalgam of modesty, piety, and tireless industry. She was to speak neither too soon nor too much. She read her Scripture twice daily. Increase Mather warned that youths who disregarded their mothers could expect to "come to the gallows, and be hanged in gibbets for the ravens and eagles to feed upon them." The attention to a youngster's spiritual state intensified at adolescence, when children became simultaneously more capable of reason and less reasonable. Fourteen was the dividing line in law,

for slander among other matters. One was meant then to embrace sobriety and to “put away childish things,” as a father reminded his Harvard-bound son.

The father was the master of the family, its soul, the governor of all the governed. He was often an active and engaged parent. He sat vigil in the sickroom. He fretted over his children’s bodies and

question but he’ll provide well for me.”

The justices reminded Mary Lacey, Jr., that if she desired to be saved by Christ she would confess. “She then proceeded,” the court reporter noted. She was more profligate with details than her mother or her grandmother had been. It was a hallmark of Salem that the younger generation—Cotton Mather included—

ging down her face, the teen-ager now managed a spot of revenge: “Oh, mother, why did you give me to the Devil twice or thrice over?” Mary sobbed. She prayed that the Lord might expose all the witches. Officials led in her grandmother; three generations of enchantresses stood before the justices. Mary continued her rant: “Oh, grandmother, why did you



From Martha’s Vineyard to Nova Scotia, New England perched on the edge of a wilderness.

souls. A majority of the bewitched girls had lost fathers; at least half were refugees from or had been orphaned by attacks in “the last Indian war.” Those absences were deeply felt. A roaring girl wrestled aloud with the demons who would assault her the following year: she was well aware that she was fatherless—how often did they need to remind her as much? But she was hardly an orphan. In a heated, one-sided conversation, observed and preserved by Cotton Mather, the seventeen-year-old admonished her tormentors, “I have God for my father and I don’t

could be relied on for the most luxurious reports. It appeared easier to describe satanic escapades when an adolescent had already been told, or believed, that she cavorted with the Devil. The record allows a fleeting glimpse of Mary’s sense of herself. “I have been a disobed—” she began, after which the page is torn.

Following Mary’s testimony, her mother was returned to the room. The older woman had so often scolded that the Devil should fetch her away. Her wish had come true! Tears stream-

give me to the Devil? Why did you persuade me and, oh, grandmother, do not you deny it. You have been a very bad woman in your time.” The three returned to jail as a clutch of warrants made their way to Andover.

By the end of July, it was clear that—with the help of a minister mastermind—the Devil intended to topple the Church and subvert the country, something he had never before attempted in New England. Certain patterns emerged as well. To cast aspersions on a bewitched

girl, to visit one's imprisoned spouse too regularly, was to risk accusation. It bordered on heresy to question the validity of witchcraft, the legitimacy of the evidence, or the wisdom of the court. The skeptic was a marked man. It could be wise to name names before anyone mentioned yours. It was safer to be afflicted than accused. Increasingly, you slept under the same roof, if not in the same bed, as your accuser.

Bewitched women choked with fits, whereas men—who stepped forward only once the trials had begun—tended to submit to paralyzing bedroom visits. Imputations proved impossible to outrun. The word of two ministers could not save an accused parishioner. Neither age, fortune, gender, nor church membership offered immunity; prominent men stood accused alongside homeless five-year-old girls. No one ever suffered afflictions without being able to name a witch. Many braced for a knock at the door.

The court met again early in August, when three men were convicted: George Jacobs, an elderly farmer; John Willard, a much younger one; and John Proctor, the first village man to have been accused. In Cotton Mather's first Thursday sermon that month, he addressed the trial that all of Massachusetts awaited. Tipping his hand a little, he called once for compassion for the accused, twice for pity for the justices. They were, after all, up against the greatest sophist in existence. They labored to restore the innocent while excising the diabolical; it made for a hazardous operation. The following day, Mather wrote excitedly to an uncle in Plymouth. God was working in miracles. No sooner had they executed five witches—all impudently protesting their innocence—than God had dispatched the Andover witches, who offered "a most ample, surprising, amazing confession of all their villainies," acknowledging the five executed that had been their confederates, and naming many more. They identified their ringleader, who came to trial that afternoon. "A vast concourse of people," noted Mather, made their way to Salem for the event, his father among them.

The demonic mastermind was a minister in his early forties named George Burroughs. He had grown up in Maryland and graduated from Harvard in 1670, narrowly missing Sam-

uel Parris. He was in his late twenties when he first arrived in Salem village, where he spent three contentious years. He was never ordained. Before and after that tenure, Burroughs served on the vulnerable Maine frontier. During a 1689 raid, he had joined in a seven-hour battle, waged in a field and an orchard. A veteran Boston militia captain lauded the Reverend for his unexpected role. The assault cost the settlers dearly; two hundred and fifty of them were killed or taken captive. Twice widowed, Burroughs retreated down the coast to Wells, eighty miles north of Boston. From a lice-infested garrison, he several times in the winter of 1692 appealed to the colonial authorities, who had withdrawn troops from the frontier, for clothing and provisions. The enemy lurked outside. They could not hold out for long.

Burroughs's spectre had been terrifying Salem villagers since April, when he first choked the twelve-year-old daughter of the Parris stalwart. He nearly tore her to pieces, bragging afterward that he outranked a wizard—he was a conjurer. (Days later, he introduced himself with the same credentials to Parris's niece, whom he also bewitched.) He had murdered several women and—evidently a secret agent, in the employ of the French and the Indians—dispatched a number of frontier soldiers as well. His mission was a frightful one, he informed the twelve-year-old: he who should have been teaching children to fear God had now "come to persuade poor creatures to give their souls to the Devil." It was he who presided over the satanic Sabbaths.

Sixteen people had given evidence at Burroughs's preliminary hearing. Nearly twice as many testified at his trial. Eight confessed witches revealed that he had been promised a kingship in Satan's reign. Nine witnesses accused the short, muscular minister—a "very puny man," in the estimation of Cotton Mather—of feats that would have taxed a giant. (Mather provided the sole surviving account of the trial, although we have no evidence that he ever entered the courtroom.) "None of us could do what he could do," a forty-two-year-old Salem weaver recalled. He had attempted to lift a shotgun that Burroughs had fired but, even with both hands, could not

steady the seven-foot weapon. Asked to account for his preternatural strength, Burroughs said that an Indian had assisted him in firing the musket. Lurking behind the testimony was what may have been the most pertinent charge against the former village minister: he had survived every Indian attack unscathed. Several of the bewitched had not been so lucky. Others who might have testified about the musket handling were dead.

The girls delivered up their own reports with difficulty, falling into testimony-stopping trances, yelping that Burroughs bit them. They displayed their wounds for court officials, who inspected the minister's mouth. The imprints matched perfectly. Choking and thrashing stalled the proceedings; the court could do nothing but wait for the girls to recover. During one delay, Chief Justice Stoughton appealed to the defendant. What, he asked, did Burroughs think throttled them? The minister replied that he assumed it was the Devil. "How comes the devil then to be so loath to have any testimony born against you?" Stoughton challenged. A brainteaser of a question, it left Burroughs without an answer.

He was equally bewildered when ghosts began to flit about the overcrowded room. Some observers who were not bewitched saw them too. Directly before Burroughs, a girl recoiled from a horrible sight: she explained that she stared into the blood-red faces of his dead wives. The ghosts demanded justice. By no account an agreeable man, Burroughs managed to join abusive behavior at home with miraculous feats abroad. If those in the court did not know already that, as Mather had it, Burroughs "had been famous for the barbarous use of his two late wives, all the country over," they did soon enough. He monitored their correspondences. He made them swear never to reveal his secrets. He berated them days after they had given birth. All evidence pointed to the same conclusion: he was a bad man but a very good wizard.

At one point, a former brother-in-law testified, Burroughs had vanished in the midst of a strawberry-picking expedition. His companions hollered for him in vain. They rode home to find that he had preceded them, on foot and with a

full basket of berries. He had divined as well what was said about him in his absence. The Devil could not know as much, the brother-in-law protested, to which Burroughs replied, "My God makes known your thoughts unto me." Was it possible, the chief justice suggested, that a devil had fitted Burroughs into some sort of invisibility cloak, so that he might "gratify his own jealous humor, to hear what they said of him"? Burroughs's answer is lost; Mather deemed it not "worth considering." The evidence dwarfed the objections. Burroughs does seem to have bungled his defense. He stumbled repeatedly, offering contradictory answers—a luxury afforded only the accusers. As for "his tergiversations, contradictions, and falsehoods," Mather chided, "there never was a prisoner more eminent for them."

Out of excuses, Burroughs extracted a paper from his pocket. He seemed to believe it a deal-clincher. He did not contest the validity of spectral evidence, as had others who came before the court, who did not care to be convicted for crimes they committed in someone else's imagination. Instead, Burroughs, reading from the paper, asserted that "there neither are, nor ever were witches, that having made a compact with the Devil can send a Devil to torment other people at a distance." It was the most objectionable thing he could have suggested. If diabolical compacts did not exist, if the Devil could not subcontract out his work to witches, the Court of Oyer and Terminer had sent six innocents to their deaths.

A tussle ensued. Stoughton—who had graduated from Harvard around the time Burroughs was born—recognized the lines at once. Burroughs had lifted them from the work of Thomas Ady. A leading English skeptic, Ady inveighed against "groundless, fantastical doctrines," fairy tales and old wives' tales, the results of middle-of-the-night imaginings, excessive drinking, and blows to the head. Though witches existed, they were rare. The Bible nowhere connected them with murder, or with imps, compacts, or flights through the air.

Ady believed that witches were a convenient excuse for the ignorant physician. He suggested that when misfortune struck we should not struggle to recall who had last come to the door. Burroughs denied having borrowed the



"Behind the back, between the legs, around my disappointed parents, nothing but net."

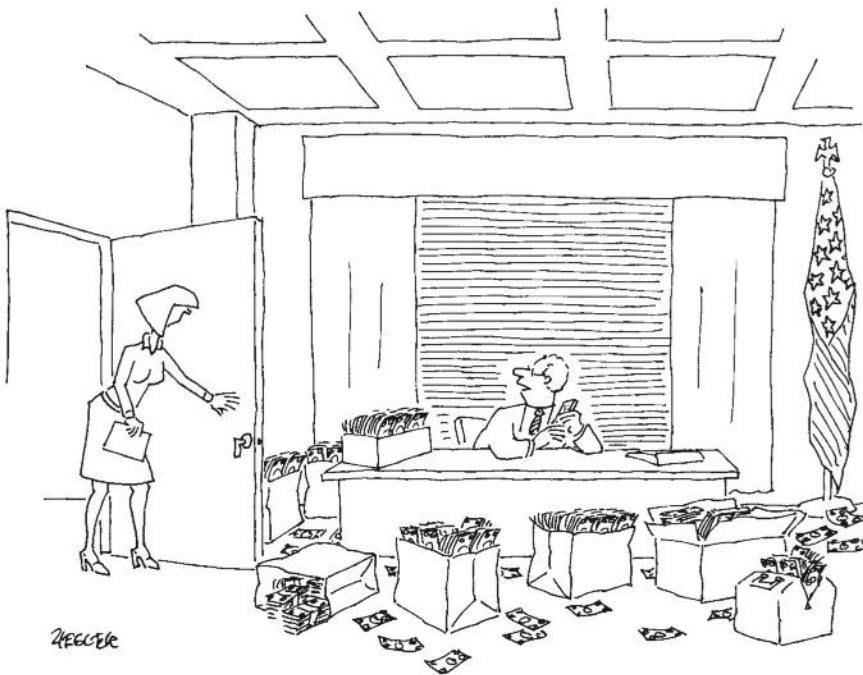
passage, then amended his answer. A visitor had passed him the text in manuscript. He had transcribed it. He had already several times agreed with the justices that witches plagued New England. It was too late for such a dangerous gambit.

Early on the morning of August 19th, the largest throng to date turned out to inspect the first men whom Massachusetts was to execute for witchcraft. Martha Carrier joined them on the trip to the gallows. As the cart creaked up the hill, George Burroughs, George Jacobs, John Proctor, and John Willard insisted that they had been falsely accused. They hoped that the real witches would soon be revealed. They "declared their wish," a bystander reported, "that their blood might be the last innocent blood shed upon that account." They remained "sincere, upright, and sensible of their circumstances, on all accounts." They forgave their accusers, the justices, the jury; they prayed they might be pardoned for their actual sins. Cotton Mather journeyed to Salem for the execution. Some of the condemned appealed to him in heartrending terms.

Would he help them to prepare spiritually for the journey ahead? It is unclear if he did so or if he held the same hard line as the Salem town minister, who did not pray with witches.

Burroughs appears to have climbed the ladder first. With composure, he paused midway to offer what many expected to be a long-delayed confession. A wisp of his former self after fourteen weeks in a dungeon, he remained a contrarian. Perched above a crowd that included his former in-laws and parishioners, a noose around his neck, he delivered an impassioned speech. With his last breaths, Burroughs entrusted himself to the Almighty. Tears rolled down cheeks all around before he concluded with some disquieting lines. "Our Father, who art in Heaven," Burroughs began, continuing, from the ladder, with a blunder-free recitation of the Lord's Prayer—an impossible feat for a wizard, one that any number of other suspects had not managed. For a few moments, it seemed as if the crowd would obstruct the execution.

Minutes later, the minister dangled from a roughly finished beam. The life



"Peggy, can we find someone to misuse a few of these campaign funds for a run to the deli to get us some lunch?"

had not gone from his body when Mather, on horseback, pressed forward to smother the sparks of discontent. He reminded the spectators that Burroughs had never been ordained. (That was also true of others on the hill that day, but at least made the dying minister seem unorthodox.) What better disguise might the Devil choose on such an occasion, Mather challenged, than to masquerade as "an angel of light"? To the last, George Burroughs was condemned for his gifts. The protests quieted, as did the minister hanging in midair. He may have heard a portion of Mather's remarks.

The execution of a beguiling, Scripture-spouting minister, protesting his innocence to the end, created nearly as much disquiet as had the idea that a beguiling, Scripture-spouting minister recruited for the Devil. It raised qualms about the court and on the bench. Several of the justices soon allowed that their methods had been "too violent and not grounded upon a right foundation"; were they to sit again, they would proceed differently. And it sent Cotton Mather to his desk.

On September 2nd, he wrote to the

chief justice. Already, Mather claimed, he had done far more behind the scenes than Stoughton could possibly know. He had been fasting almost weekly through the summer for an end to the sulfurous assault. He felt that the Massachusetts ministers ought to support the court in its weighty, worthy task; none had sufficiently done so. He volunteered to step into the breach, to "flatten that fury, which we now much turn upon one another." He had begun to write up a little something, "to set our calamity in as true a light as I can." With this new book, he proposed to dispel any doubts that innocents were in danger, a passage he underlined. Mather promised to submit his narrative to Stoughton, so that "there may not be one word out of point." Might the chief justice and his colleagues sign off on his endeavor, which would remind the people of their duties in such a crisis? In a singular valediction, Mather wished Stoughton "success in your noble encounters with Hell."

Increase Mather, too, was at work on a book. As father and son wrote, confessions and concerns multiplied. Reports circulated that seven hundred witches preyed on Massachusetts. A prominent

Bostonian carried his ailing child the twenty miles to Salem, the Lourdes of New England, to be evaluated by the village girls, incurring the wrath of Increase Mather. Was there "not a God in Boston," he exploded, "that he should go to the Devil in Salem for advice?" Things were wholly out of hand when a Boston divine was up against an adolescent oracle. On October 4th, for the first time, seven suspects, all under the age of eighteen, went home on bail. Among the eldest was Mary Lacey, Jr., Ann Foster's headstrong granddaughter.

"I found this province miserably harassed with a most horrible witchcraft," Governor Phips wrote on October 12th, in his first report to London on the supernatural plague. He sounded as if he were writing from Sweden rather than from Boston, borrowing Mather's details of that infestation. Grappling with the future of the court, which was scheduled to reconvene in two weeks, he insisted that the justices had always ruled with empirical evidence, but admitted that many now condemned their work. He placed a ban on witchcraft books. "I saw a likelihood of kindling an inextinguishable flame if I should admit any public and open contests," Phips explained. That ban applied only to volumes that did not bear the name Mather on the cover. "The Wonders of the Invisible World" soon slipped into print, followed by Increase Mather's "Cases of Conscience," both artfully postdated to 1693.

The Wonders of the Invisible World was America's first instant book. Garlanded in credentials, it advertised itself as having been "published by the special command of his Excellency the Governor." Stoughton prefaced the volume, professing himself mildly surprised but immensely gratified by the work. What a timely account, so carefully and moderately composed! The chief justice was particularly grateful for Mather's painstaking efforts, "considering the place that I hold in the Court of Oyer and Terminer, still laboring and proceeding in the trial of the persons accused and convicted for witchcraft." Cotton Mather introduced the text with a tribute to his own courage. It was crucial that proper use be made of the "stupendous and prodigious things that are happening among

us." He did so only, he professed, because no one else volunteered. Weeks earlier, he had promised that his work would in no way interfere with that of two colleagues, whom he effectively cut off at the pass.

What constituted sufficient proof of witchcraft? Father and son disagreed. Fifty-three-year-old Increase explained in "Cases" that a "free and voluntary confession" remained the gold standard. When credible men and women could attest to these things, the evidence was sound. He had no patience for mewling teen-age girls. One did not accept testimony from "a distracted person or of a possessed person in a case of murder, theft, felony of any sort, then neither may we do it in the case of witchcraft." He cast a vote for clemency: "I would rather," he wrote, "judge a witch to be an honest woman than judge an honest woman as a witch."

Cotton Mather worried less about condemning an innocent than about allowing a witch to walk free. In "Wonders," he set out "to countermining the whole plot of the devil against New England." He would not be surprised if the witchcraft reached even farther than was suspected, folding into his volume an account of a celebrated thirty-year-old English case, similar to Salem's, except perhaps for a combusting toad. He chose that trial with reason: it was one in which spectral evidence had served to convict. Mather seems occasionally to have embroidered on court reports with details that appear nowhere in the surviving pages: the smell of brimstone, money raining down, a corner of a sheet ripped from a spectre. He otherwise adhered closely to the evidence while working some magic with his pages; no witnesses for the defense or petitions on their behalf appear in "Wonders." Mather included all the crowd-pleasing spectral stories, while issuing regular reminders that flights and pacts played only supporting roles in the convictions.

He expressed his fervent hope that some of the witches in custody might prove innocent. They deserve "our most compassionate pity, till there be fuller evidences that they are less worthy of it." Twenty pages later, he wrote of George Burroughs, "Glad I should have been if I had never known the name of this man." His very initials revolted Mather. He

wrote up five trial accounts in all; Burroughs alone was so powerful a wizard that he could not be named.

As quickly as Mather worked, "The Wonders of the Invisible World" arrived as a case of too much too late. Conceived as a justification, billed as a felicitous accident, advertised in the author's own words, the volume read as a full-throated apologia. Governor Phips disbanded the witchcraft court at the end of October. Days after the book's publication, Mather wailed to his Plymouth-based uncle. A cataract of "unkindness, abuse, and reproach" roared his way. People said lovely things to his face and hideous things behind his back. He meant only to tamp down dissent at a critical time. He found himself under fire for another infraction as well: filial disrespect. He had not endorsed his father's volume. (Nor had his father endorsed his.) Among all the freewheeling accusations in 1692, not once had a father accused a son or a son implicated a father. He could see little to do but die.

The new administration could ill afford a rift at this juncture; Increase Mather added a postscript to his pages. He remained convinced that witches roamed the land. He meant not to deny witchcraft but to make its prosecution more exact. He had declined to endorse his son's volume only out of an aversion to nepotism; he was most grateful to him for having established that no one had been convicted purely on spectral evidence. He too made a point of including Burroughs, who had, Increase Mather assured his readers, accomplished things that no one who "has not a devil to be his familiar could perform." Burroughs had deserved to hang. As Cotton Mather saw it, he had made a case for prosecuting the guilty, his father for protecting the innocent. Were they not saying the same thing? An early death no longer appealed.

A year after the trials, Cotton Mather treated two newly afflicted girls. A seventeen-year-old servant began to convulse after insulting a woman who had been imprisoned in 1692. The girl interrupted sermons and fell into trances. She went twelve days without food. She

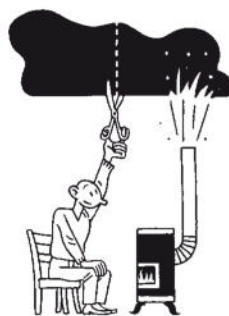
discoursed with spectres who tempted her with diabolical pacts; she shrieked so loudly that well-wishers fled the room; she tore a leaf from Mather's Bible. He followed the same protocol he had with the Goodwins, four years and nineteen executions earlier, assembling groups to pray and to sing Psalms at her bedside.

Both girls eventually recovered. Mather devoted thirty-eight pages to the initial case but left them unpublished. Given the tenor of the times, he wrote, "No man in his wits would fully expose his thoughts unto them, till the charms which enrage the people are a little better dissipated." He did not care in 1693 to cultivate what, centuries later, would be termed the paranoid strain in American politics, with its "sense of heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy." Political stability remained paramount. Mather did, however, retail the teen-ager's report that Frenchmen and Indians—"horrid sorcerers and hellish conjurers"—had colluded in Salem witchcraft. He insisted on it for years.

"There is no public calamity," Mather noted, in "Wonders," "but some ill people will serve themselves of the sad providence, and make use of it for their own ends, as thieves when a house or town is on fire, will steal what they can." Twenty-eight years later, a smallpox epidemic raged through Boston. Cotton Mather faced down the entire medical establishment to advocate something that seemed

every bit as dubious as spectral evidence: inoculation. He had studied medicine at Harvard. Over the decades, he had come better to understand infectious disease. Moving from imps and witches to germs and viruses, he at last located the devils we inhale with every breath.

The battle turned so vitriolic that it dragged Salem out of hiding; Mather was bludgeoned for lunacy on two counts. Yet again, Massachusetts seemed to be in the grip of distemper. The people talked, he huffed in his diary, "not only like idiots but also like fanatics." He remained as steadfast on the subject of inoculation as he had been equivocal on witchcraft. In November, 1721, a homemade bomb came sailing in his window at 3 A.M. His reputation never recovered. ♦



THE DEATH AND LIFE OF ATLANTIC CITY

Zeno's paradox down the shore.

BY NICK PAUMGARTEN

Mike Hauke opened a pizza and sub shop in Atlantic City in 2009, but only after he had failed in nine tries to rent the space to somebody else. He had bought the building three years earlier on the advice of his father, an accountant who considered distressed real estate a smart long-term bet. This piece of real estate seemed to test the proposition. It was a bedraggled three-story clapboard house that years of neighborhood demolition and neglect had stranded at the edge of several mostly vacant blocks, which together formed an urban badlands reaching all the way to the dunes. This was the South Inlet, a once thriving part of town and now more or less a desolate slum at the northeastern end of Absecon Island, the landmass that is home to Atlantic City and three other municipalities. People from “offshore,” as locals like to call the mainland, tend to think of the island’s Inlet end as north, because it’s upcoast, but locals call it east. Atlantic City has a Bermuda Triangle effect; it can confound a compass.

Three blocks west of Hauke’s place, an immense slab of steel and glass was rising over the badlands: a hotel and casino to be called Revel, destined to be bigger and more opulent than anything Atlantic City had ever seen—two towers, reaching almost fifty stories, nearly four thousand rooms, and parking for more than seven thousand cars. Morgan Stanley, the investment bank, had bought the land in 2006, for seventy million dollars, and sunk about \$1.2 billion into the project. (Revel, as some have noted, is “lever” spelled backward.) By the end, the cost of building Revel reached more than \$2.4 billion, making it the most expensive private construction project in the history of New Jersey.

Hauke went after the crumbs. Unable to find a commercial tenant for his house’s ground floor (the apartments upstairs were designated Section 8, for

low-income tenants), he started selling rudimentary takeout to Revel’s construction crews. Their rush-hour bulk orders overwhelmed his staff, but off hours the place was dead: a trickle of casino workers and, in Hauke’s words, “shitbags, crackheads, hustlers, and pimps.”

Hauke, a recent graduate of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, had spent a couple of years in Hoboken and Manhattan working in marketing, but he had no restaurant experience. One of his first customers was a neighborhood junkie known as V8 Man (“All the white kids are junkies,” Hauke said. “The Inlet does it to everybody”), who, on opening night, picked a fight at the counter with a male prostitute and another customer; Hauke smashed a pizza paddle on the counter and used the sharp end to scare him off. More than once, a guy came in trying to unload stolen merchandise as the victimized storekeeper came running up the street in pursuit. One morning, a neighborhood kid rode by on a bicycle and threw a crude pipe bomb through the window; Hauke chased him in his car and, after cornering him briefly in an abandoned house, hounded him on foot across a vacant tract called Pauline’s Prairie, named after Pauline Hill, a city planner in the sixties who’d had this stretch of the neighborhood bulldozed for urban renewal, which never came. The kid, looking over his shoulder, ran into the side of a parked box truck. The police appeared and put him in cuffs. His grievance was that cops had been patronizing Hauke’s shop and that sheriffs had evicted his cousins, Hauke’s Section 8 tenants, from one of the apartments upstairs. The tenants, according to Hauke, had been running a welfare scam. They’d also been throwing dirty diapers on his customers and fishing for pigeons from the roof.

Hauke hoped that, in spite of such annoyances, Revel would either provide him with an income stream or else buy

him out. A few neighborhood property owners said that it would never happen. They’d been holding on for years themselves, in the hope of selling to a big casino, and in the interim they’d been gutted by rising property taxes and ongoing decay. The problem was that the area was zoned for big casino-hotels. You couldn’t build a house, and the few houses left in the neighborhood—most had been demolished or had burned down, accidentally or not—were old and badly battered by the salt air. One of them, down near the beach, across the street from a run-down low-income housing complex called the Waterside, belonged to a teacher Hauke had got to know named Tony Zarych, who’d moved to Atlantic City as a teen-ager forty years earlier, when his family was buying up property around town. He’d worked as a baccarat dealer at the Sands, until it closed (it was demolished in 2007), and now taught English as a second language at an elementary school. He liked to hunt wild turkey offshore and sometimes had carcasses hanging outside. His property taxes had risen sharply, as the city contended with a steep drop in tax revenues from the casinos. “Get out while you can,” Zarych told Hauke.

Sure enough, in 2009, amid the financial meltdown, Revel, only half built, ran out of money. In April, 2010, Morgan Stanley quit the project, booking a loss of almost a billion dollars. Construction stopped. Hauke’s business withered. “There were no more tourists or construction workers,” he recalled. “Mostly just cops. And crackheads wanting free shit.” But something about the city, and about the Inlet’s seaside squalor, made him want to stay on. Maybe it was the fact that his great-grandmother had attended shul in the Inlet. Or that he’d simply got sand in his shoes, as the locals say about those who take to the place.

After grinding along for another year,



If not for zany schemes, Atlantic City would be a sand dune. Revel was supposed to be the most opulent casino the place had ever seen.

Hauke shut down the shop, spiffed it up, and rechristened it Tony Boloney's. He bought a food truck, which he named the Mustache Mobile, and developed a line of pizzas and novelty subs that he marketed as "indigenous Atlantic City grub," as though he'd revived an obscure provincial cuisine. Soon, Tony Boloney's began winning foodie awards and luring in not just gamblers, night-clubbers, food-truck connoisseurs, politicians, and cops but also a procession of casino magnates and real-estate speculators who were visiting the neighborhood, often on the sly, to size up the distressed property next door.

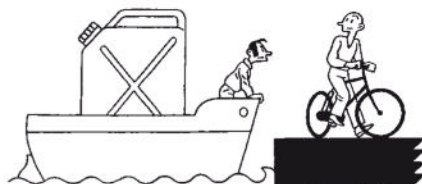
At the beginning of 2011, Governor Chris Christie pledged tax incentives to Revel worth more than a quarter of a billion dollars. (The incentives were tied to certain revenue targets, which, in the end, Revel failed to meet.) Christie had evidently decided that Revel's success was essential to the survival of Atlantic City, and therefore his gubernatorial track record. His pledge helped Revel secure new financing from an array of hedge funds, including Chatham Asset Management and Canyon Capital, which manage hundreds of millions of dollars in New Jersey state pension funds.

Construction resumed, and Christie came to town. After a photo op at a famous sub shop called the White House and a visit to the Revel site, he dropped in at Tony Boloney's and urged Hauke to keep the place going. "Listen, you gotta stick around," Christie told him. The Revel executives were emphatic as well: "It'll look bad if you close. Please don't go anywhere." The head of Chatham Asset Management hired Hauke to cater his annual Halloween party, up in Essex County.

Revel opened in the spring of 2012, with Beyoncé performing a series of concerts in its auditorium. (She also took over the Presidential Suite, relegating Michelle Obama and her daughters to another suite.) The plan had been scaled back—just fourteen hundred rooms, and one tower instead of two. The tower's midsection had a half-dozen stories not yet built out; you could see clear through it. Still, it was an impressive building, with sleek, airy marbled atriums and lobbies that had little in common with the smoky, windowless,

carpeted caverns of the older megacasinos down the boardwalk. Unlike all the rest, it directed one's attention to the ocean and had ample outdoor space, a two-acre terrace with firepits and cabanas. Even from the outside, Revel had an ethereal appeal. The reflective glass took on the sky's hue and became almost invisible at dusk, a stealth casino guarding the edge of town.

If only. During construction, a tower



crane collapsed. Lightning struck a worker's cement bucket and killed him. Three top Revel executives died in a plane crash. A guest plunged from one of several escalators that climbed vertiginously through the heart of the lobby. A couple were found dead of an apparent drug overdose in a suite. The N.F.L. player Ray Rice punched out his fiancée in an elevator, and the surveillance video went viral.

The casino wasn't making nearly as much money as the developers had anticipated. Some observers blamed the layout—the hotel-room elevators didn't access the casino floor, and a long, tortuous trip from the entrance to the check-in desk didn't take you through it, either—or the fact that Revel prohibited smoking, or that its slot machines didn't seem to pay out, or that it was stingy with the comps. Even though occupancy was decent and the night clubs and restaurants were busy, the tables and slots weren't taking in enough to offset the cost of operating the place—the burden of debt service, high property taxes, bad leases with the tenants, and an expensive arrangement for power and light. Within a year of opening, Revel filed for bankruptcy. It restructured and emerged from Chapter 11 a few months later, but the economics still didn't make sense, and so, in the spring of 2014, it went bankrupt once again. Finally, last September, unable to find a buyer, it closed.

From the time Morgan Stanley began searching in vain for equity partners, Revel had been in play, and all along

Tony Boloney's had served as an informal commissary for would-be investors and buyers. Among those whom Hauke and his staff said they'd seen were Steve Wynn, who had sold the Golden Nugget in 1987 and vowed never to come back; various hedge-funders from New York; and a group of Chinese men—the Export-Import Bank of China was at one point in talks to buy a piece—who took over Hauke's tables and held meetings for hours, without ordering anything.

A mysterious character in tattered clothing and a handlebar mustache had been showing up a few times a year, engaging the staff in conversation about space travel and Elon Musk. He claimed to represent someone who was going to buy Revel. Hauke and his team were skeptical, but one day last summer, just before the casino closed, the man rolled up in a baby-blue Bentley convertible. Maybe he was for real. "My guy's going to offer ninety million," he said. His guy, he went on, was from Florida and intended to erect a "Tower of Geniuses" on the Revel site, a high-rise think tank, which would draw on NASA and the federal government's aviation-research facility at Atlantic City Airport, just offshore.

If not for zany schemes, Atlantic City would still be a sand dune. Within weeks, news broke that a little-known Florida developer named Glenn Straub, the owner of Palm Beach Polo Golf and Country Club, had offered ninety million dollars to buy Revel. Straub wanted to put up the aborted second tower and fill it with academics and scientists charged with solving the world's problems: your Tower of Geniuses. Few in town took this seriously, but, as far as the bankruptcy was concerned, he'd established a baseline. Everything has a clearing price. The bad news was that Straub's offer was less than four cents on the dollar—a chilling signal of how far Atlantic City had fallen and may yet fall. The good news was that the building—and you might even say the town—was worth anything at all.

Most cities exist as a consequence of commercial or strategic utility. Atlantic City is more of a proposition and a ploy. The town fathers of Cape May, the first American seaside

resort, weren't interested in a railway, or perhaps the class of people who'd ride in on one—the well-to-do arrived from Philadelphia by boat—so a group of investors built, in 1854, what became known as a “railroad to nowhere,” to a spot a little way up the coast that was more or less the shortest possible distance from Philadelphia to the sea. Over the decades, and with the industrial-era advent of leisure time and disposable income, this forsaken wedge of salt marsh and sand became “the world's playground”—a crucible of conspicuous consumption and a stage for the aspirations and masquerades of visitors and entrepreneurs. In some respects, Atlantic City was where America learned how to turn idle entertainment into big business. For a while, it was home to some of the world's grandest hotels (the Marlborough-Blenheim was the largest reinforced-concrete building in the world, and was later imploded in the music video for Bruce Springsteen's “Atlantic City”), as well as some of its more ardent iniquities and diversions. The night clubs were as often as not fronts for backroom gambling halls, intermittently tolerated by the authorities.

The city, like so many, has its racial demons. At the turn of the twentieth century, Atlantic City had one of the highest African-American populations of any city north of the Mason-Dixon Line, owing to the abundance of jobs in the hotels. The archetypal amusement was that of white working-class visitors kicking back in the boardwalk's famous wicker rolling chairs while black people did the pushing—a “public performance of racial dominance,” notes the historian Bryant Simon, in “Boardwalk of Dreams.” Though the Northside, traditionally a black neighborhood, had been a thriving district, the decline in tourism to the city, after the Second World War, hit it hard. With the rise of affordable air travel, people started going to Florida and the Caribbean instead. The city desegregated. Disneyland opened.

Legalized gambling was supposed to rescue the city from its obsolescence as a resort and convention town, a condition that came to national attention during the 1964 Democratic Convention there and grew more conspicuous as the decade wore on. A dozen years later, the state passed the Casino Con-

trol Act, which was, at least ostensibly, an attempt to reverse the decline. But, perhaps predictably, a lot of the money that flowed in flowed right back out—to the casino operators and their financing schemes (“I made a lot of money in Atlantic City,” Donald Trump said at the recent Republican debate. “And I'm very proud of it”) and to their subsequent efforts to lobby for the approval of casino gambling in other states. New Jersey, which taxes the casinos to fund a seniors' prescription-drug program, among other things, always got its piece.

Neglect of the city has been attributed to a bloated municipal payroll—a budget nearly double what it was ten years ago—and the years of corruption and mismanagement in city government. Some blame the suffocating effect of the casinos, which are boxed off from the city and are designed to keep patrons inside losing money rather than outside spending it. Others point to the thorny old problem of race or the dreary question of the structure of municipal government statewide.

The dividing line between south and north, and between white and black, used to be Atlantic Avenue, the main commercial street, which runs parallel to the sea. It was where South Jersey shopped for wedding dresses and jew-

elry; now it's a gantlet of shabby storefronts and fast-food joints, running toward and away from the New Jersey Transit bus terminal. In the streets that run from the boardwalk, dilapidation and squalor are not hard to find. Wood's Loan Office, a pawnshop established in 1927, is owned and operated by Martin Wood, a seventy-nine-year-old Atlantic City native. Wood, who is white (his grandfather, a metallurgist, came to town from Lithuania at the end of the nineteenth century and used to scavenge for junk on the beach with a horse-drawn wagon), has noticed an uptick in the number of shopping bags from the outlet mall, a few blocks away. In his opinion, the sixties were worse. “It's not that bad here. Yet.” Twenty years ago, the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority moved the pawnshop a few blocks, in an effort to remedy the city's oft-lamented lack of a supermarket. “But they opened a discount liquor store next door to the new supermarket,” Wood said. “That was not a good move. They wound up with winos hanging around. People were scared to go to the supermarket. So it closed up.”

“Atlantic City turned its back on the boardwalk,” Paul Steelman, a prominent casino architect who grew up nearby, said. “It's the most prominent pedestrian walkway in the world. It's



*“I understand you’ve spent the summer on someone’s ass.
Can you tell us what that was like?”*

got everything going for it except the buildings that are on it.” His solution: “Cut holes in the casinos and let out all those people, all that capital.”

In order to prevent monopolies, the Casino Control Act stipulated that no one could own more than three casinos. In the eighties, Donald Trump became the first to hit that limit. Eventually, the provision was scrapped, and by 2014 Caesars owned four. Carl Icahn now effectively controls a quarter of the market with just two casinos, the Tropicana and the Taj Mahal.

Does Atlantic City need more gambling, or less? There are proponents on both sides. Some favor alternative entertainments (concerts, water parks, polo, legalized marijuana) or the panacean potential of higher education (Stockton University, a state college headquartered offshore, has long wanted an Atlantic City campus). A few push for smaller boutique casinos, and others swear by the existing big-box regimen, just done better. In Las Vegas the ratio of revenue is two-thirds non-gaming to one-third gaming. In Atlantic City the situation is reversed. Since 2006, gaming revenue has dropped by half, from a peak of \$5.2 billion to \$2.7 billion. As that stream dries up, logic suggests tapping others. And yet the casinos remain lucrative. Divided among eight casinos—that’s how many are left—\$2.7 billion isn’t bad. This may be the locals’ most commonly stated reassurance. The city has a higher concentration of casinos than anywhere outside Nevada. It gets twenty-five million visitors a year.

I asked Steve Perskie, who wrote the Casino Control Act as a state legislator representing Atlantic City, if casinos, in the final accounting, had been good for the town. “Compared to what?” he replied. “Imagine Atlantic City without them.”

When word gets out that a city is on the skids, people seem eager to imagine post-apocalyptic desolation, a rusting ruin at Ozymandian remove from the glory days. But American cities don’t seem to die that way. They keep sopping up tax dollars and risk capital, thwarting big ideas and emergency relief, chewing up opportunists and champions.

Two weeks after the shuttering of Revel, Trump Plaza closed—the fourth casino to do so in 2014. The first was

ENCYCLOPÆDIA BRITANNICA

We were as excited as when we’d bought our new car,
and it, too, weighed a ton, the entire history
of the world and everything in it
on two whole shelves in our family room,
sitting like a judge over our new color TV.

We fact-checked over dinner
to settle arguments erupting like Etna (Volume 8)
while the Caesar salad was being served.
In which movie does Charlie Chaplin eat a stewed shoe?
What was the exact date of Kristallnacht?
Before we had our Encyclopædia Britannica,
everybody had opinions instead of facts,
which they stuck to, uncorrected, unto death.

But you couldn’t pick a fight with the Encyclopædia
Britannica.

Even saying its name upped my I.Q.
It was written by Einsteins, by presidents
and professors—people brainier than anybody
in my house, on my street, in my town—
experts—unlike my mother,
who never finished high school.

the Atlantic Club, né the Golden Nugget, built in 1980 by Steve Wynn, with financing by Michael Milken and one of the earliest iterations of the junk bond, and then owned (and rechristened), in succession, by Bally’s, Hilton, and Resorts International. Two competitors, Tropicana (owned by Icahn) and Caesars (controlled by the private-equity firms Apollo Management and TPG Capital), bought out the bankrupt Atlantic Club, closed it, and divvied up the scraps. Next came the Showboat. It was profitable, but its owner, Caesars, hobbled by debt, needed to consolidate. (The amputation failed: in January, Caesars declared bankruptcy; another of its holdings, the Bally’s casino, has been rumored to be the next to go.) Meanwhile, Trump Entertainment Resorts declared bankruptcy (its fourth), and Icahn, who’d bought up Trump’s debt, played a game of chicken with the casino workers’ union and the state. (Donald Trump himself no longer runs the company or the casinos, and he has sued to have his name removed.) In December, the Trump Taj Mahal was about to close; Icahn, having squeezed the state and the union

for concessions on taxes and benefits, found twenty million dollars to keep it open, and since then it has limped along, a zombie casbah.

It’s not all the big shots’ fault. There’s just been less money to go around. Atlantic City has lost its monopoly on legalized gambling on the East Coast. First came the casinos on Indian reservations in Connecticut, in the nineties, and then, in recent years, the advance of gaming across state lines, in Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and upstate New York. (Some industry experts will tell you that Manhattan is destined to have tables, too.) Now there’s talk of casinos in North Jersey, which, along with video-slot parlors at the racetracks (“racinos”), would cannibalize the action in Atlantic City.

Neighboring states approved legalized gambling in the hope that it would do for their economies and state treasuries what it once did for New Jersey’s. Perhaps they should hope instead that it does not. The casino closures in Atlantic City have contributed to the loss of nearly ten thousand jobs, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and who knows how many associated

Its index of topics was a book in itself.
“The History of the Persian Empire.”
“The Nine Planets in our Solar System.”
“The Anatomy of the Polar Bear.”

One day, in high school, I looked up my name and wrote a report on the “other” Jane Shore (1445-1527), the mistress of King Edward IV (Volume 20). If my parents had had the Encyclopædia Britannica when they were deciding what to name me, would I have been a Jennifer instead of the penitent mistress of a king made to walk the streets of London, barefoot?

Now, over half a century old, it resides in a climate-controlled storage unit on River Road, in the cartons I packed after my parents died: its bulging knowledge forever leashed together between covers, warped and moldering, its defunct contributors bulldozed under for eternity, as in a family graveyard—its shahs replaced with ayatollahs, Pluto demoted to a dwarf planet, its endangered animals now extinct.

—*Jane Shore*

income streams, reputable or not. The city has fewer than forty thousand permanent residents; the majority of Atlantic City’s workers live offshore, in the townships of Atlantic County, which, in the first quarter of this year, led the nation in foreclosures. Property taxes in the city have doubled since 2008 and were up twenty-nine per cent in 2014, to make up for the drop in tax revenue from the casinos and in the taxable value of the property. The city is around four hundred million dollars in debt. Earlier this year, its credit rating was downgraded to junk-bond status.

After convening a few summits on the predicament in Atlantic City, which resulted in a dire report, Governor Christie, in January, appointed two emergency managers, Kevin Lavin and Kevyn Orr, to oversee the city’s finances, wresting control from the mayor and the city council. The fact that Orr had previously served as Detroit’s emergency manager, steering Detroit into and out of bankruptcy, led observers to predict that he’d been hired to do the same for Atlantic City. Perhaps mercifully, the mayor, Don Guardian, was relieved of some of the hardest decisions, about

who and how many to fire and what services to deprive the citizens of. “A good manager welcomes a good auditor,” he told me. The mess was now Christie’s. Presiding over the first bankruptcy for a New Jersey municipality since the Great Depression would not help his Presidential ambitions, and, perhaps more important, it would raise the already high costs of borrowing across a state whose finances are very grim. Christie staked a lot on his rescue of Atlantic City, and so far the bet’s not looking so good.

In May, the city submitted a plan to lay off two hundred city workers, about a fifth of the municipal workforce. Orr returned to private practice, having been paid seventy thousand dollars for three months of part-time work. (He’d billed the state nine hundred and fifty dollars an hour.)

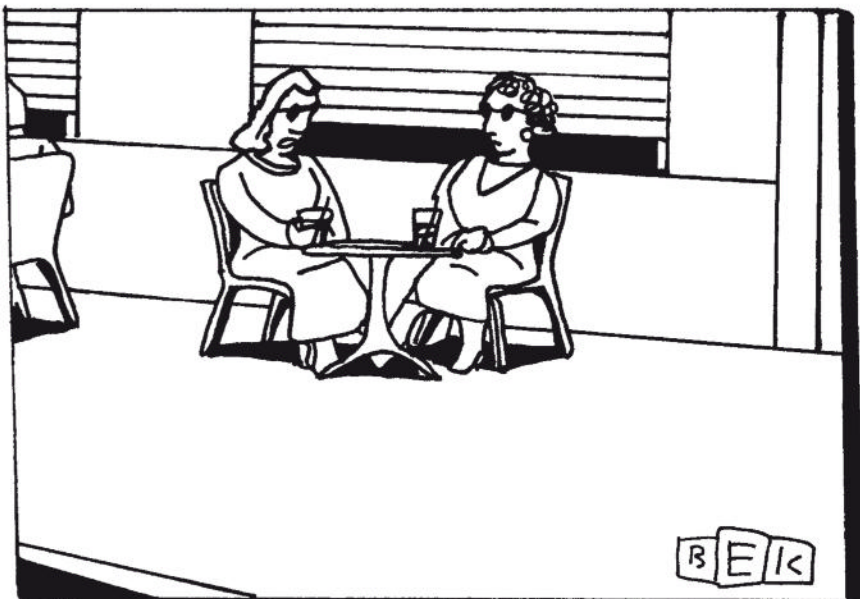
Abandonment, and the spectre of bankruptcy, intensified the bleakness of the winter in Atlantic City. At one end of the boardwalk, Revel loomed dark. At night, the blare of piped-in pop warped in the wind, and floodlight spilled out over the dunes, which, post-

Sandy, were just a layer of sand atop an armature of giant sandbags. The obituarists who came to gawk didn’t have to bother going so far. On the façade of the first casino that one saw after pulling off the expressway there was the ghost lettering of the immense sign that once spelled out “Trump Plaza” and, beneath it, a billboard that read “The Center of It All.” (The small print read “Gambling Problem? Call 1-800-GAMBLER”—advice, maybe, for the city itself.) Visitors regularly stopped to photograph this, to add to their portfolio of what some locals, resenting the attention, considered ruin porn.

The greatest ruin was to the lives of the thousands who’d lost their jobs. One morning, I met Dawn Inglin, who had gone to work as a cocktail waitress at the Plaza when it first opened, in 1984. She’d come to town three years before, when a friend got her a role in a dinner-theatre company down shore, in Ocean City, and then she found herself auditioning at Harrah’s, which, in those days, used cocktail waitresses as dancers in its TV commercials. “The choreography was difficult,” she recalled.

When she applied for a job at the Plaza, she auditioned for Donald Trump at Trump Tower, in Manhattan. She remembers a weigh-in, and an interview in a bathing suit, and she and the others were required to wear two-and-a-half-inch heels. (When I met her, she had her hair up and was wearing a smart lavender suit.) “I very much enjoyed working for Donald Trump,” Inglin said. “When he was there, it was tip-top. You’d’ve thought he was the Messiah.”

Inglin’s generation of casino workers, whose professional primes track the birth and decline of the industry in Atlantic City, speak wistfully of the abundance and camaraderie of the halcyon days. “Back in the eighties and nineties, the money flowed. It was glamorous,” Inglin said. “Then the attention and the business was diverted from the Plaza to the Taj. Things started closing. Restaurants, room service. For four or five years, there were constant rumors that this or that person was going to buy us. I don’t have enough fingers and toes to count the number of people who were going to save us. The last few years were so stressful. You watched people lose their jobs. They were taking away severance,



"He's very self-loathing, but not enough."

the machines disappearing, equipment rolling past you."

After thirty years, she was fourth in seniority among cocktail waitresses at the Plaza and was making \$8.99 an hour, plus benefits. It ended last September. "When we found out we were closing, we were standing at the bar—the last bar in the casino. We saw it on the six-o'clock news. We were frantic."

Despite coming up empty in a search for another job, Inglin felt that she was going to be all right. Since the Plaza closed, she has been attending classes at the community college in pursuit of a degree in human services—a growth field in these parts. "We have an addiction problem here," she said.

I met a bus driver named Kip Brown, who worked the Port Authority route, up and back each morning, for Academy Bus Lines. He had been at Academy for fifteen years and was No. 3 in seniority, out of seventy drivers in the region. As ridership has fallen, Academy has been cutting back on its schedule. The number of visitors arriving by bus is an eighth of what it was a quarter century ago. In the spring, Brown, just forty-seven, retired.

Now he was looking for work as a livery driver. Brown also used to work in the casinos, at the Showboat, bussing tables, and at Trump's Castle, stripping

and waxing floors. "When Donald and Ivana came to the casino, the bosses would order all the black people off the floor," he said. "It was the eighties, I was a teen-ager, but I remember it: they put us all in the back."

He lives in the Northside, on Martin Luther King, Jr., Boulevard, in a house that, like many in town, was inundated during Hurricane Sandy. "Sandy: that was the beginning of the fall of Atlantic City," he said. Because of the rise in property taxes, the value of the house is well below the value of the mortgage, so he is stuck with it. "If I could get out of my house, I would. I don't want to live in Atlantic City, to be honest with you." Recently, one of the employees at his cousin's corner store had been killed in an armed robbery.

Atlantic City has had three great bosses, political or otherwise. In the decades prior to the First World War, Louis Kuehnle, a transplanted New Yorker and powerful Republican known to all as the Commodore, turned the resort into a bustling metropolis and the state party into a patron and beneficiary of the evolving local aptitude for vice. Enoch (Nucky) Johnson, his successor and the basis for the Steve Buscemi character in "Boardwalk Empire," continued this work and presided over

Atlantic City's glory years, during Prohibition, which, largely thanks to his efforts, never really pertained. The third was Hap Farley, a Republican legislator and master puller of wires, whose political swan song was his support, behind the scenes, for the second (and successful) attempt, in 1976, to pass the state bill to legalize gambling in Atlantic City.

Since then, there have been party bosses, governors, and mayors with varying degrees of power and venality, but no kingfish of the stature of the Commodore, Nucky, or Hap. "I'll give you Atlantic City," the mayor of Camden said, to F.B.I. agents disguised as Arabs during the Abscam sting. "Without me, you do nothing." But by then such an offer was beyond the reach of any one man. In city politics, the Democrats held sway. (The electorate is now thirty per cent Hispanic and forty per cent black; Democrats outnumber Republicans nine to one.) The only Republican to rule City Hall in the casino era was James Usry, the city's first black mayor, who got caught up in a corruption investigation that cost him the 1990 election—until 2013, when, to the great surprise of the city's political establishment, Don Guardian, a gay white Republican, beat Lorenzo (Rennie) Langford, an African-American, by fewer than four hundred votes.

Langford, out of the public eye since then, has been writing a memoir and working as a substitute teacher. He lives in the same modest split-level that he's been in for twenty-eight years ("In two years it'll be paid for"), on a street in the Northside that has been renamed L. T. Langford Lane. We talked in his "man lair," a furnished subfloor with jazz paraphernalia and a wall of fame: his wife, Nynell, with him and Jay Z and Beyoncé; Stevie Wonder; Janet Jackson; Michael Vick; and Lionel Richie. He had on a Champion sweatshirt, jeans, and Nikes. His grandfather had come to town in the twenties, bought some trucks, and won trash-removal contracts at the big hotels. Langford's father dropped out of high school and worked in a factory. Langford went to college, then dealer school at the Casino Career Institute, on the Black Horse Pike, one of the old Atlantic City arteries, and started at Caesars when it opened, in

1979. He spent fourteen years in the industry—as a floor supervisor at the Playboy and a pit boss at the Atlantis and the Taj Mahal. In 1992, he ran for city council.

People dish a lot of dirt about Rennie—how he'd put his extended family on the payroll; how he had sued the city and, after becoming mayor, got a settlement of more than four hundred thousand dollars (a judge later ordered him to repay it); how his wife's goddaughter, the pop singer Ashanti, got paid twenty thousand dollars for spending a day at the Atlantic City high school—but it's hard, when you're in his home, hearing his side, not to admire his cheek, in the hurly-burly of Chris Christie's New Jersey, or not to credit his assessment that in the end what has befallen Atlantic City could not have been prevented by any mere satrap.

"For the last four years, everything was my fault," he said. "No matter how many times I talked about neighboring jurisdictions or the national economy, it was 'Langford, it's your fault.'" As for the Revel project, he says that from the start he'd considered it "extremely risky" in a saturated market, and that it got such extravagant support from Christie and the state because it was a way to steer the support of the construction unions to the Governor and his party. Langford said, "What Christie thought would be his shining achievement will be the albatross around his neck."

His successor, Guardian, is sixty-two and from North Jersey. He is a former Boy Scouts of America executive. ("I couldn't have gotten out at a better time," he told me; he left just before the Scouts' policy regarding homosexuality became a national controversy.) Guardian made his name, locally, as the head of the city's Special Improvement District. He was a keen advocate and errand man for the tourist precincts, the guy out on the boardwalk on his bicycle at dawn, picking up the plastic cups. He was not a part of any machine, but he worked tirelessly to round up votes, and Langford, having survived a bruising, expensive primary and confidant of the black vote, apparently got complacent. Guardian also picked up the support of the state's Republican establishment and of the

unions, in light of his promises to put "cranes in the sky."

Guardian has been frank about the city's predicament yet optimistic about its prospects. He has a jolly goofball air and a tireless enthusiasm for particulars. He wears bow ties and has trouble pronouncing his "r"s and "l"s. His partner of twenty-one years, Louis Fatato, whom he married last summer, runs a spa at the Borgata. Guardian is routinely unpunctual and speaks off the cuff with enough dash that Chris Filiciello, his chief of staff, usually sticks close to keep watch. At City Hall, a dreary D.M.V.-like cube of concrete and glass, they share an office on the seventh floor, with sweeping views toward Revel and the South Inlet. When I visited, Filiciello looked on coolly from his desk, dipping into a tub of animal crackers, while Guardian enumerated some of the intractable financial problems the city faces. "If I can take eighty million out of the budget, that's sustainable, but that's not feasible right now, not if we want to provide public safety and public works. I can get forty out."

In public, he projects a no-bullshit boosterism reminiscent of Ed Koch. He was the keynote speaker at this year's annual luncheon of the Metropolitan Business and Citizens Association, a kind of super-charged chamber of commerce. The luncheon was at Caesars Palace, on the day, as it happens, that Caesars, the parent company, declared bankruptcy. The Palladium Ballroom was filled with glad-handers, as the casino's employees—employed for now—poker-facedly delivered pats of butter molded into the profile of Augustus.

"You think you had a bad day?"



Guardian began. "I woke up this morning, Caesars filed bankruptcy, all three elevators are broken in City Hall, and there's a major water leak at public works." He went on, "Hey, at least we're not Detroit!"

"Last year, I promised you a root canal," Guardian told the crowd. "I just forgot the Novocain." But the good news was that "the root canal is over and the

healing is about to begin." Or, as he said at the end, "2015's got to be better than 2014. 2014 sucked!"

The hosts of the luncheon, and the founders of the M.B.C.A., were the local philanthropists Gary Hill and John Schultz. Schultz, an Atlantic City native and three-term city councilman, and Hill, from Reading, Pennsylvania, made their money operating night clubs (Studio Six, Club Tru) in a forlorn stretch of town where the Sands used to be. Eventually, the casinos figured out the night-club business, so Schultz and Hill got out, and started giving their money away. Twenty years ago, they bought an old building near the clubs, next door to a porn shop, and converted the top three floors into a triplex they called Casa Del Cielo, where they live together and preside as ambassadors, of a kind, over various gaudy but charitable entertainments. In a way, they are avatars of the town's long-dormant gay scene, which has reawakened in recent years.

The night of the luncheon, they had me up for a drink. Past a suite of paintings by Ringo Starr and a library shelved with scrapbooks chronicling Hill and Schultz's twenty-seven years together, a loggia led to a heated pool, which they once filled with wine corks. Here and there were garish furnishings salvaged from the casinos: headboards from Trump Plaza, smokestacks and banquettes from the Showboat, chandeliers from the Sands. Last summer, they hosted Mayor Guardian's wedding; Schultz officiated. The event was catered by Hauke and Tony Boloney's.

It was hard to find a building or enterprise in the city limits that was not in some way touched by crisis and folly. But none was more conspicuous, and of greater likely consequence to the city in the long run, than Revel. Last September, with Glenn Straub's ninety-million-dollar offer as the stalking horse, the bankruptcy court held an auction to sell it. The winner, at a hundred and ten million dollars, was Brookfield Property Partners, based in Toronto. Brookfield owned the Atlantis in Nassau and the Hard Rock in Las Vegas, and so saw some synergy here, but it couldn't make a deal with the owners of Revel's adjacent power

plant, which had been built solely for Revel and was charging Revel three million dollars a month for utilities. (The power plant was a separate, independently owned entity, called ACR Energy Partners—an arrangement that has proved poisonous.) In November, Brookfield decided to forfeit its deposit, of eleven million dollars, and walk away. The only bid left, apparently, was the one predicated on a Tower of Geniuses.

Straub began unfurling his plans. He said he'd spend three hundred million dollars building the second tower and another half billion to buy up derelict property around town. He'd refurbish Bader Field, the defunct downtown airport, and establish an equestrian center for two thousand horses, polo fields, high-speed ferries to Manhattan, a life-extension university, and the world's biggest indoor water park.

Whenever I called Straub, he answered his own phone and seemed not to have assistants or gatekeepers, or any kind of filter at all. The first time he picked up, at his club, he told me, through bites of an apple, that he had just finished playing a polo match, that he lived and worked on a yacht, that he was debt-free, and that he had two brilliant adult daughters with whom he had failed to spend enough time. Once, he answered his phone as he was getting fingerprinted by the Casino Control Commission, for his gambling-license application. Another time, he announced that he was at a urinal. With bankruptcy-court procedures in mind, I asked, "So what comes next?" and he replied, "I wash my hands."

Straub invited me to meet him at Revel one day in February, on one of his trips to town. He tended to fly up on Spirit Airways, to save money. When I arrived, he was still busy trying to buy Bader Field. (The city, the Mayor had told me, wanted far more for it than Straub was willing to pay.) Straub also talked of buying the racetrack, Trump Plaza, the Showboat, and several large tracts of undeveloped land in various parts of the city. At times, he talked as though he'd bought some of these things already.

In the all but abandoned Revel corporate offices, overlooking a slatey winter sea, two of the remaining Revel employees were waiting for Straub to arrive.

They didn't work for him yet, but, given that he was the putative buyer, they allowed him to use the space and they were inclined to be deferential.

"It's kind of hard to believe Glenn Straub might be our white knight, but here we are," one said.

"Just a tip," the other said. "He likes to be called Mr. Straub."

Straub arrived alone, wearing a zip-up hoodie under a blazer. He had a Florida tan and hair that was brushed back and reddish-brown. He's trim, at sixty-eight, and he had the bent gait of an aging country-club athlete. In a kitchenette, he made a sandwich for himself and sat down in a conference room with a view down the boardwalk: in the foreground, the empty lot that would one day, he hoped, be home to his water park, and then, stretching south, the casino cordillera—Showboat, Taj, Resorts, Bally's, Caesars, Trump, Trop.

"It'll be done the right way," Straub said. "I'll actually wash the windows here. It'll cost a couple of dollars. There must be ten million windows in this frigging place. That's the first thing we'll do. Get the laser light shows and wash the windows and hire four thousand employees. That way, I'll get the politicians. 'Oh, Straub, I know him. I want to do business with one of his marinas,' or whatever. . . . Get their attention. 'Guys, I got a high-speed ferry. . . . Midtown Manhattan, what do you got there for a pier?' Politicians can get you into that place that you can't get into."

Straub's way of talking in a stream-of-consciousness rush, in the manner of an Appalachian Don King, often made his big plans seem scattershot and his tactical explanations disjointed, at least to someone not adept in vulture finance. "He has a learning disability," his daughter Kim, a branding consultant in New York, told me. "When he was a kid, when it was time to read aloud in class, he'd count the people who were supposed to read before him and then, just before his turn, go to the rest room. He's a bit of a savant."

Straub comes from Wheeling, West Virginia, where his father had a business providing transportation to the Texas Eastern pipeline and later owned auto-leasing franchises and taxi fleets. "So you worked, and if you didn't work

Dad got the belt out and beat your butt," Straub said. "Anyway, he died, just when I got my driver's license." After high school, Straub and a brother helped run the businesses. In time, they owned a network of sand and gravel quarries and concrete and asphalt plants; highway- and airport-construction contracts made them rich. (In recent years, those long-moribund quarries, in the upper Ohio River Valley, have been found to sit atop vast reserves of oil and gas, extractable by horizontal drill, making Straub even richer.)

Straub retired at forty, moving his family (his wife, from whom he divorced in 2007, and two daughters) to Florida. "I lasted six months," he said. He started investing in distressed and bankrupt properties. It was a good time to have cash on hand. In the wake of the savings-and-loan crisis, at a Resolution Trust Corporation auction, he bought a twenty-two-hundred-acre golf and polo club in Wellington, for \$27.1 million. It was called Palm Beach Polo. "All of a sudden, people were giving me a half a million dollars for an acre," he said. "I sold two or three hundred million dollars' worth, and we still have another thousand acres down there." A big driver was the equestrian center: "Never once thought it would turn out to be a gold mine, but it did turn out to be a gold mine, because then the Bloombergs of the world and their daughters, and all the movie stars' daughters, they would go down there, and they would have the big Olympic stars do the show jumping, and there was this thing called polo. I didn't know what a polo game looked like. They put you on a horse. And I thought, This isn't that hard. I was good in sports, amateur sports. I can hit things. I can pick a fly out of the air."

Straub has been called "the dictator of Palm Beach polo." His reign has been contentious. In numerous lawsuits, he has been accused of neglecting his residents, as well as the grounds, and charging undue fees. In 2010, he was tried, and ultimately acquitted, on criminal charges of polluting protected wetlands. He was once convicted of contempt, after interfering with a federal marshal who'd come to seize a yacht at a marina Straub owned. He tried to appeal the verdict all the way to

the Supreme Court, without success. Through the years, he has been proudly litigious. "If you check me out, I'm pretty good at protecting our rights in the court system," Straub told me.

In the conference room, he told me about his idea for an ocean liner. "An old ocean liner, like the QE2. I'm gonna buy it," he said. He squeezed mayonnaise from a packet. "Bring this ocean liner in, and I don't know if you've been around Ripley's down in Orlando, the whole building shaking and everything else. I'm gonna teach my kids, or my kids' kids, what World War II was all about, and the Holocaust, and Zeros coming in from Japan, and so when you go inside this thing, this ship, it's gonna make you feel like you're being bombed, like Pearl Harbor when the damned Zeros came in, took out our whole fleet in the Pacific. The ship's suites where the crew used to be will be for my construction workers, because if we're gonna spend this kind of money up here I need to get cheap housing for them, so instead of shipping them back to Philadelphia and bringing them here every day I'll let them store themselves in the bottom of the ship. It'll be like the back lots at M-G-M."

Throughout the winter, Straub made regular trips to Atlantic City and to the federal bankruptcy court in Camden, where he pressed his attempt to have his bid approved. Amid innumerable motions, hearings, and rulings, attorneys representing bank lenders, unsecured creditors, jilted tenants, other prospective buyers, the power company, and the gutted estate argued for and against his offer, sometimes changing sides as the circumstances evolved. Other bidders waded in and wandered off. The power company remained a sticking point. The lawyers racked up their fees and did their pressers on the courthouse steps.

One cold morning in February, Straub arrived at the courthouse in a gray suit, with a trenchcoat slung over his shoulders. He said he'd left his cell phone in a bathroom at the airport, and someone had retrieved it and was sending it back. He looked at the pairs of lawyers filing in through the door. "A few more guys and we'll get a soccer game going here," he said. "I wish I was



getting paid a thousand bucks an hour." Straub's lawyer, Stuart Moskowitz, of Freehold, not normally a bankruptcy attorney, called them the "bankruptcy cabal." It was essentially the deadline on Straub's bid, now at ninety-five million dollars, but he had failed to close, owing to some unresolved questions about his obligation to old leaseholders and to the power plant.

"We need to know what we're buying," Moskowitz said.

Revel's lawyer told the judge, "We're ready to move on to another buyer."

Problem was there didn't seem to be one. With this in mind, Straub and Moskowitz had been threatening to put in a much lower bid if their offer fell through. At one point, Straub stood and handed his lawyer a piece of paper. Moskowitz read aloud, "Sometimes the judge has to protect the debtor from himself."

In the back of the courtroom, a lanky man in a yellow sweater, his graying hair

perfectly in place and his eyes darting around, fidgeted with his fingers as though he were handling invisible chopsticks. His name was Vincent Crandon. He was a low-profile Jersey dealmaker from Mahwah, and he had been circling various properties in Atlantic City for years, to no avail. He'd failed in attempts to buy Trump Plaza and the Atlantic Club. Early on, he'd been after a bricks-and-mortar property to go with an Internet-gaming company. But his quest had morphed into something else, and so now he just lurked, waiting for the court, or perhaps the entropy of Atlantic City, to scuttle Straub's bid. Quietly casting himself as the new white knight, he'd submitted an offer, but so far it had gone unacknowledged.

"Straub is done," Crandon told me later. "We've put in a better offer. We're sitting back, taking our time." He added, "Straub thinks he's the only guy in town."

The town, and the sellers, seemed

to think so, too. After the ninety-five-million-dollar offer fell apart, Straub put in a lower bid, for eighty-two million, and lawyers for Revel and the lenders, increasingly desperate, supported it in court. At the beginning of April, the presiding judge, Gloria Burns, who said she would not let the case delay her impending retirement, abruptly ruled in favor of Straub. The questions of the tenants and power plant remained unresolved. For a few days, anyway, the town experienced something like hope.

Atlantic City, formerly a breeding ground for big ideas, was now a tar pit—trapping financial mastodons and big-eyed dreamers, whether or not their intentions were pure, as the capricious gods of commerce looked on. Revel kept luring in new ones. In April, the day after Straub took ownership of Revel, he called Crandon and—according to Crandon, anyway; Straub denies it—offered to flip the property to him for a hundred million dollars. A couple of days later, Crandon drove down to Atlantic City. With Revel blacked out (owing to the inevitable dispute between Straub and ACR, the power company), the only people allowed inside were security officers from the Casino Control Commission. They stood in darkness guarding acres of idled slot

machines, which Straub wasn't technically authorized to own, since he had no gaming license. So, according to Crandon, the two men who would decide Revel's fate met in one of its parking garages. Crandon had along one of his partners, Don Marrandino, an Atlantic City native known as Rockin' Don, for his music-industry connections. He had been the president of Hard Rock in Las Vegas and of Caesars East Coast operations. Straub was accompanied by Tara Lordi, his adviser and "toxic-asset manager," a horse-woman and former banker. Crandon says Straub told them he wanted much more than a hundred million for Revel, but at least he now had a possible out, and Crandon had an in. (Straub says the meeting never happened.)

Crandon had been eying Revel for a year. Crandon, who is fifty-three, grew up in Delaware, but his parents were from New Jersey, and as a kid he worked at a service station his grandfather owned on the Black Horse Pike. His surname used to be Ceccola; Crandon is an adaptation of Cranendonk. His father-in-law is Theodor Cranendonk, a wealthy Dutch oil trader who was once imprisoned in Italy on charges of delivering thirty bazookas to the Mafia. ("It was all made up," Crandon says. According to Crandon, Dutch commandoes sprung

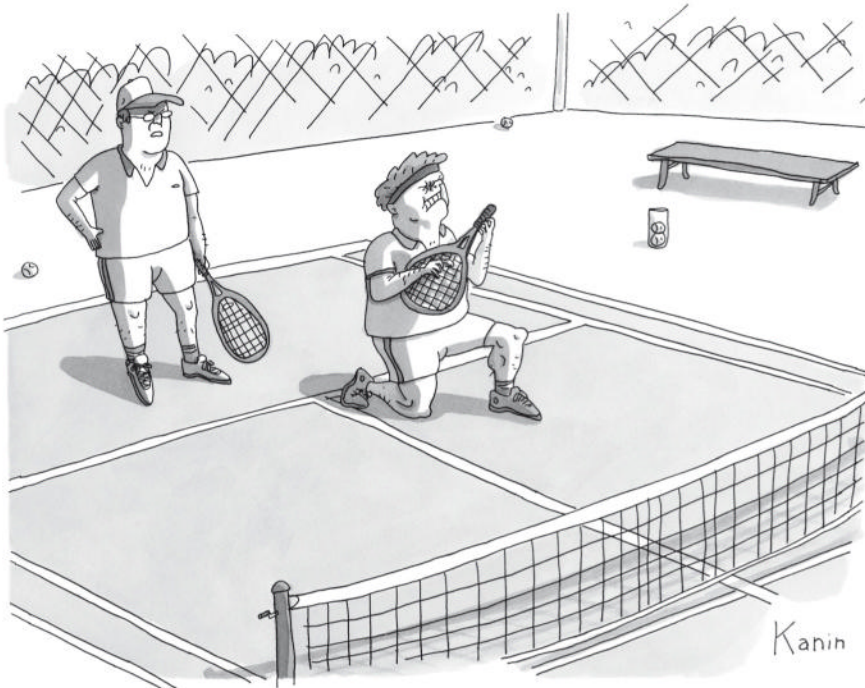
Cranendonk from a prison hospital and brought him back to the Netherlands.) One of Crandon's investment vehicles is called MidOil, but Cranendonk was not involved in the Revel bid. "He doesn't do gambling," Crandon said.

Crandon said his group—"We're Jersey guys"—planned to spend hundreds of millions reconfiguring the space. The new name would be Rebel. Crandon said they were planning a forty-night Bon Jovi residency. Rockin' Don had the pull.

The money wasn't from Jersey guys. Crandon says he spent a marathon weekend in town and in New York wooing representatives from a Chinese real-estate firm that had been buying up properties around the United States. Crandon's group and the Chinese were betting that Macau, the Asian gambling mecca, was tapped out, amid a Chinese government crackdown on corruption and gambling, and that travellers from mainland China would soon be including South Jersey on their U.S. itineraries. The Atlantic City airport would be the hub for jumbo-jet charters from Asia. The margins are better if you can lure a plane from Hong Kong than a bus from Port Authority. Atlantic City, born in proximity to the population and early industrial wealth of Philadelphia, would now reach halfway around the world for money and the guests from whom to separate it.

Crandon believed that Straub was planning to demolish Revel. A consultant had told him you could net a hundred million dollars if you sold it off as spare parts. There was a precedent: In 2004, Straub bought Miami Arena for twenty-eight million dollars, half what the city had paid to build it. He promised to turn it into a venue for horse shows, conventions, and minor-league sports, to help revive downtown Miami. "Tearing it down serves nobody's purpose," Straub said at the time. Four years later, he tore it down.

Events on the ground in Atlantic City seemed to be pushing Straub in that direction. As soon as he bought Revel, he found himself, not unexpectedly, in a war with ACR, the power plant, and thus, in short order, with the city. The maneuverings often seemed frivolous and petty, except that a city was at stake. Straub refused to pay ACR



"You can't take a solo after every serve."

the three million a month for power, and ACR refused to provide it for free. And so Revel remained dark: no light, heat, air, or water, no sprinklers or alarms. The city's fire marshal deemed the building unsafe, and the city rescinded Straub's certificate of occupancy and began fining him five thousand dollars a day. Observers wondered about catastrophic fire and debilitating mold.

Straub dug in. He told reporters, as he unsuccessfully challenged the plant's owners in court, "We'll erase them off the map." He brought in a fleet of diesel generators and parked them outside the casino. But he had no permits, and ACR owned much of the connecting infrastructure. Back to court they went. Straub, the loser again, sent the generators away. He told me, referring to city and state officials, "If they won't work with me, I'll just go back to Miami." Publicly, he made the threat explicit: "I'll tear the building down."

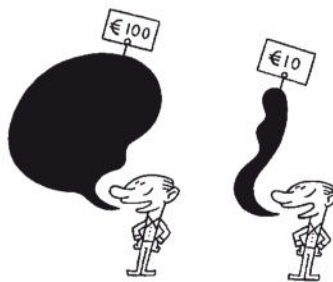
To circumvent ACR, Straub had set about trying to buy the empty casino next door, the Showboat, and tap into its power plant instead. The Showboat's owner, at the moment, was Stockton University, the state college, which, a few months earlier, had bought it to establish a long-desired Atlantic City campus. The university had paid just ten dollars a square foot. "You can't even buy tile at Home Depot for ten dollars a square foot!" Herman Saatkamp, Stockton's president, told me.

But the campus plan had suddenly fallen apart, when Trump Entertainment, owners of the Taj Mahal, next door, unexpectedly opted to enforce an old covenant mandating that the Showboat be a casino-hotel, and nothing else. Icahn, who controls Trump, didn't want a college campus next door. "Who is this guy?" Bob McDevitt, the president of Local 54, the casino workers' union, said of Icahn, with whom he has been feuding for a year. "How does he get to decide everything? He's disemboweling the city."

Icahn blames the unions. "I saved the Tropicana, which was bankrupt, and made it into one of the only vibrant and surviving casinos in Atlantic City," he told me. "I have also saved the Taj Mahal and have saved six thousand jobs. Bob McDevitt has caused three casinos to close and the loss of thousands of jobs.

Ask yourself: Who is the villain of this story?" Capital or labor? Germany or Greece? Depends on whom you talk to. In July, Taj workers, having lost many of their benefits, voted to authorize a strike.

At any rate, now Stockton was stuck with a vacated casino on its balance sheet and monthly maintenance costs of four hundred thousand dollars. That'll



buy you a lot of tile. And so Saatkamp, the university's president, who is also a leading scholar of George Santayana ("Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it"), rushed into a provisional agreement to flip the Showboat to Straub. At the end of April, Saatkamp, out of his depth in these sharky waters, resigned as Stockton's president, his tenure scuttled by the Showboat and Revel mess. Santayana: "Skepticism is the chastity of the intellect, and it is shameful to surrender it too soon."

Throughout the spring, Crandon pressed for a deal while Straub held out for more. Straub told me, "Everyone says, 'Oh, you're so fucking smart, Mr. Straub.' And I'm saying, 'I'm not smart. I can just outlast everybody.'" Tara Lordi e-mailed Crandon one afternoon in early April:

Can you kindly by the place so I can get back to the warm weather I'm freezing my ass off here.

In early May, according to Crandon, the two men met aboard Straub's yacht, the *Triumphant Lady*, which he'd brought north to Atlantic City and docked at the Golden Nugget. Crandon says they actually shook on a deal, for a hundred and thirty-two million dollars. (Straub denies this meeting took place and in general was dismissive when I asked him about Crandon, referring to him as "Kramden.")

But they continued to haggle over terms and timing as Crandon worked out his arrangement with the Chinese. There were stories of Straub stuffing a local law firm, and of his filling a truck with Revel fixtures and tools, bound for Florida. (He denies wrongdoing in both cases.) His deal to buy the Showboat foundered, and a court gave Stockton the go-ahead to seek another buyer. As weeks passed, Crandon made promises that he'd soon hold the keys to Revel, and then the deal would recede again: Zeno's paradox down the shore.

At the end of June, Crandon texted me to say that his deal with Straub was off. "Greed and evil have destroyed A.C." He explained, "What happened is we got circumvented." Straub, apparently, had cut him out of the loop and gone directly to the Chinese. He had come to see the potential of junkets from overseas. Crandon sent photos of Tara Lordi in Shanghai with a Chinese man, whom he still, vestigially, called "my partner": "2 days after that photo, Chinese canceled our deal." Crandon vowed revenge: "We will keep it in litigation for years. No one will get Revel."

If Straub was really planning to sell to the Chinese, he wasn't saying. Lordi says she went to Shanghai to play polo. Straub said he was looking for groups to help manage the hotel and the casino. All the while, Revel remained closed. Still no light shows or clean windows, to say nothing of the four thousand new jobs the city so desperately needed. Revel's remaining employees were let go. There was no one left, really, except for the security guards overlooking the slots, in the sweltering heat of an un-air-conditioned glass box in high summer.

"No word on Revel, Showboat, or any of these things," Mike Hauke said, down at Tony Boloney's. "It's frustrating." Weekends were busy, weekdays were soft. It was hard to make decisions or plans. "Sometimes, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, you drive around town and see four or five cars." The talk at the shop was mostly about water parks, or the recent news about the mysterious disappearance of three million dollars, which the Langford administration had given to a Bronx businessman in 2013, for a community-loan program that seems to have never made a loan. ♦

IN THE ACT OF FALLING



DANIELLE McLAUGHLIN

SOURCE: PROEHL/GETTY (BIRD)

It was a little after 7 A.M., and outside in the garden her nine-year-old son, Finn, was stringing a tennis net between two trees, stringing it not in the normal fashion, the way one might to play tennis, but horizontally, like a hammock. He was wearing a pair of too short trousers, perhaps the trousers from last year's school uniform, and no shoes. The grounds on this side of the property were ragged but pretty, bounded by a low stone wall that allowed views across the fields to the gray slate roofs of Portlaoise. "I think it might've been a mistake to tell him about the ducks," Bill said.

"It's not about the ducks," she said. "If it wasn't the ducks, it would be something else."

They were having coffee in a room at the front of the house, a high-ceilinged, corniced room that she continued to think of as the dining room, though two years on it remained unfurnished, apart from a small mahogany table they'd brought from their old house and two faux Queen Anne chairs. The room was long and narrow, with a south-facing bay window and another, smaller window overlooking the side garden, where their son was going back and forth between the trees, checking and double-checking his knots. He'd found the net in the shed. It wasn't their net, though she supposed it was now; it had come with the house, and had belonged to one or other of the people who had owned this place before them. Finn had commandeered it for the purpose of catching dead, or soon to be dead, birds. Birds, it seemed, were the next great heralders of the apocalypse, and Finn had decided that it was important to catch them in the act of falling. Before the birds, there had been two long weeks of insects: a meticulous recording of spiders, flies, and beetles, tallies of the dead entered each night in a blue-lined copybook.

Bill left the window and came to sit beside her at the table. He was wearing an old shirt from his banking days, old but expensive, a Lanvin pinstripe with double cuffs, crumpled because he'd slept in it the night before, and a pair of track-suit bottoms. He'd stopped getting his hair cut, and now it hung limp and slightly graying just below his ears.

"Will you take Finn to school today?" she said. It was half inquiry, half request.

"We'll see," he said. "We don't want to rush things, do we?"

He took one of the books from the floor beside his chair. It was one she hadn't seen before, a hardback with a picture of an ornate karyōbinga on the cover, and she looked away to spare herself seeing the price. They were all over the house, these books, and journals, too, little dog-eared towers of them in the bathroom and next to their bed, copies surfacing randomly on kitchen shelves and windowsills. They were about art, mostly: Oriental art, Japanese antiquities, Muromachi paintings, wooden carvings detailed with gold leaf and lacquer. They were the kind of books she might once have bought for herself, books she could still possibly take pleasure in were they not so hideously expensive.

"It's been almost a month," she said. "He needs to go back to school. His suspension ended more than a week ago."

Bill didn't answer immediately. Instead, he turned a page with ceremonial reverence, lifting the glossy paper, letting it fall, smoothing a hand across a monotone print depicting a line of leafless trees fronting a temple. "I don't think he's ready," he said. He gestured toward the garden, where Finn was leaning into the net, resting his weight on it, testing it. "Look at him. Isn't he happy?"

Her coat was on the back of her chair, and she took it, draped it across her shoulders. It was cold, this room, even in April, even with the chimney blocked up and insulating tape sealing the splintered frames of the sash windows, the original windows, as the auctioneer had pointed out, practically salivating at the sheer oldness of it all, as she had, too, back then. It was easier for Bill if Finn didn't go to school, she thought; that way he didn't have to walk with the child to the bus stop, and then ride the bus with him into town, didn't have to make his way back, only to repeat the journey when school finished in the afternoon.

"Astonishing, when you consider it," he said. "The deep recession into space."

"Sorry?" she said, before realizing that he was talking about something in the book. He was off then, feeding her random pieces as he read, while she ate a slice of toast and drank her coffee. Above the table, a lead-crystal chandelier hung like a tree in winter, most of its pendants missing. She should take it down

and be done with it, she thought. She should put it out in the shed with the rest of the rubbish and pick up something at IKEA. She'd imagined a life for the people who'd lived here before, had pieced it together from the things they'd left behind—the skeleton of a pony trap, its metal spine rusting at the back of the shed, the stone hot-water jars. But it occurred to her now that perhaps she'd gone about it wrong, that perhaps they were to be known not by what they left but by what they took, in which case she would never know them. Outside the window, Finn was throwing stones of varying size into the center of the net. "If you do decide to take him to school," she said, "I found his school tie when I was tidying the playroom. It's hanging in his wardrobe."

"O.K.," he said, without looking up, and she knew there would be no school for Finn today.

This is what she'd told Finn about the ducks: yesterday, in Stephen's Green, the ducks on one of the ponds had died, the smaller pond with the gunmetal-green railings by the side exit to the shopping center, not one or two of the ducks but all of them. She'd seen them as she cut through the park on her way to the office, stopping where a small crowd had gathered. And Bill was right: it was no story for a child, especially not this child, so sensitive that sometimes she thought the very passage of air around him might strip the skin off him. But she'd arrived home late, and tired, and, on entering the kitchen and seeing them together in easy silence at the table, she'd felt a need to announce herself, to offer something that might allow access to their world. And so she'd unleashed it, the story of the ducks, how some were almost wholly submerged, just the tip of a wing or a tail feather breaking the surface of the water, while others lay on the bank, their jewelled heads pressing beak-shaped indents into the silt. One had made it onto the grass and lay toppled beneath the spiked branches of a hawthorn bush, and she knew that if she touched it it would still be warm. All the time she was talking, Finn was looking at her, and she could almost hear the thoughts whirring inside his head. Bill had raised an eyebrow as he dished out mashed potatoes and peas,

the only dinner that Finn could be persuaded to eat. She'd looked toward the oven to see if perhaps he had cooked something else for her. He'd followed her gaze. "I could do you an egg if you like," he said.

"It's O.K.," she said. "This is fine." She would like to know how exactly Bill passed his days, but this mystery was as unfathomable to her as the lives of the house's previous inhabitants. It was not as if he spent much time on home maintenance. He'd had business cards printed advertising his services as a financial consultant, but thus far no clients had materialized. She'd taken a seat opposite Finn at the kitchen table and watched him eat his food the way he always did: peas first, one by one, then the potatoes, all the time his small brow furrowed with such intensity that she imagined the ducks resurrected inside his head, waddling crookedly, beating their wings against the walls.

She slipped her arms into her coat, took her briefcase from the hall, and went outside, to where her car was parked in front of the house. "Bye, Finn," she called, and raised her hand in a wave. He waved back, then returned to the task of untying one of the strings. Setting down her briefcase, she crossed the lawn, the heels of her shoes sinking into the damp ground, and stopped beside the net. For a moment, she considered what it might be like to climb onto it, to close her eyes, to sleep. Finn had man-

aged to work the string loose, and now he was circling the tree with it again, but at a point higher up, round and round, preparing to refasten it. He stopped when it would go no further and began to tie a knot. "Here," she said, "let me do that."

"It has to be a pipe-hitch knot," he said. "Can you do a pipe hitch?"

She shook her head. "I'd better leave you to it, then," she said.

Sheets of paper were spread out on the grass. Stooping to get a better look, she saw that they were covered in complex, intricate diagrams, the margins scribbled with words like "plague" and "apocalypse" and little hand-drawn pictures of birds, small, fat-bellied things with disproportionately long legs and large feet. Among the drawings was a copy of a magazine, a publication brought to the house from time to time by a preacher woman. She was one of the few people who braved the muddy lane to visit them or, more precisely, to visit Bill and Finn, because she always called in the daytime.

"Was the preacher here?" she said, picking up the magazine.

"You mean Molly?"

Since when was he on first-name terms with the preacher woman? "Is that what she's called?"

"Yes." He'd completed the knot, and was tugging on the ends to see if it would hold.

"So when was Molly here?"

"Yesterday. But she couldn't stay long.

She had to go visit a woman who's come all the way from Virginia to live up by the lake." Satisfied with the knot, he turned to his mother. "Virginia is a girl's name," he said, "but it's also a place in America. The first peanuts ever grown in America were grown in Virginia, but now the people of Virginia mostly grow tobacco, which is immoral and also causes plagues."

"What's Molly like?" she said, conscious that she should be on the road already. Delay would be paid for at an extortionate rate; ten minutes could cost her an hour if she hit the M50 at the wrong time.

Finn considered for a moment. "You know Sally, the horse trainer on 'Blue Mountain'?"

"Blue Mountain? Where's that?"

"It's a TV program."

When she shook her head, he tried again. "You know Princess Karla, from 'The Jupiter Gang'?"

What on earth were these programs that Bill was letting him watch? She would book a day off next month, she decided; even a half day would do. She would make an appointment with the school principal, she would ring a child psychologist, she would return the calls of that woman from the bank. There was no longer any reason to hope Bill might do these things.

Finn had his eyes screwed up, concentrating. "You know Angelina Jolie?" he said.

Goodness, she thought, this Evangelical was not what she had in mind. What she had in mind—an image she knew to be stereotypical, ridiculous—was a middle-aged matronly woman in homely dress, nineteenth-century Mormon meets Catholic nun, with gray hair in a bun and mannish lace-up shoes. "Yes," she said. "I know Angelina Jolie. Is that who she's like?"

"Sort of," he said. "She's got hair like her, and eyes like her, but she's not as tall. And her skin is more tanned."

It was nonsensical to be jealous of a woman who had made it her life's purpose to decry pride and vanity and sins of the flesh, to decry most things, if the magazines she delivered were anything to go by. She went to put the magazine in her briefcase, but the boy snatched it from her and, going a little distance away, he settled himself cross-legged in



"Which is the genetically modified corn?"

the grass. She watched him as he read: such a serious child, serious, fervent, and, though it pained her to admit it, strange. She went over and stood beside him.

"We are living in the last of days," he said, without looking up. "Soon, the armies of the Beast will come, and there will be pestilence and lakes of fire."

"Give me that," she said, reaching for the magazine, but he was too quick for her. Jumping up, he took off to the far end of the garden, pages fluttering in his hand as he ran. She looked at her watch: there was no time to go after him. "I'll see you this evening," she called, as she walked back across the grass to her car.

She drove down the avenue, swerving around the deepest of the pot-holes, slowing through the shallower ones. On her right, in contrast to the mossy stone wall, a crude post-and-rail fence separated their property from the wasteland next door, which had once formed part of the house's extensive grounds. A developer, having no use for the house itself, had fenced it off and sold it, together with an acre of garden. When she and Bill had first viewed it, there had been a pair of tall wrought-iron gates at the end of the avenue, but by the time they moved in the gates were gone, taken, she'd learned later, by a creditor of the builder. The wasteland was meant to be Phase 2 of a development of three-bed semis. Last winter, a storm had felled the advertising hoardings along the perimeter and now they lay half buried in the grass, their peeling fragments of swings and smiling lovers and flowerbeds like remnants of an ancient mosaic. Phase 1 was a field distant, a ghost estate already sliding into dereliction. She'd heard that a few of the houses were occupied, despite being without plumbing or electricity, and once, when she'd crossed the wasteland to peer through the fence, she'd seen a van parked outside one and a mound of refuse sacks outside another.

Three weeks ago, during geography class, Finn had struck the boy who sat beside him square on the mouth. "For no apparent reason," according to the headmaster, though it later trans-

pired that the boy had put his hand on Finn's arm to stop him jiggling it up and down. "That constituted assault," Bill said. "Finn was acting in self-defense."

"They're nine-year-old boys," she'd said. "Can we stop talking about them like they're on indictment?" There had, apparently, been a lot of blood, a degree of panic, and a lost tooth, though it turned out that the tooth was a milk tooth and would have been lost anyway. "Hardly the point," the headmaster had said, when Bill offered this, and she couldn't help thinking that the suspension might have been one week rather than two had she gone on her own.

At midday, she took her lunch to the park. The day was cool, with barely any sun, and there were plenty of benches free. She chose one beneath a tree and unwrapped her sandwich. A van from the Parks Department pulled up beside the small pond and reversed onto the grass. A warden got out, and, going around to the back of the van, unbolted the doors and let down the ramp. From where she sat, she could hear him making a series of cooing, coaxing noises. Eventually, a duck plodded out, dazedly, as if the van were a hard-shelled futuristic egg from which it had just hatched. It stood, bemused, on the ramp for a moment, and then suddenly there were more ducks behind it, pushing and jostling, and it was too late for it to turn back. A dozen of them, maybe more, descended onto the grass, a mixture of lustrous greens and blues and mottled browns, and, as the warden herded them toward the water, a child began to throw bread, striking one of them on the head. The warden shooed them onward, and they were wading in now, swimming, moving in tight little circles before broadening their orbit.

They should have made her happy, but they didn't. They were indistinguishable from the ducks that had died the day before. If she hadn't cut through the park yesterday morning, if she hadn't taken lunch here today, she might even have thought, next time she visited, that they were the same ducks. There was trickery of a sort at work, a sleight of hand that suggested that the first ducks had never existed, and only she alone, in silent witness, knew better. She put

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the remainder of her sandwich in the bin and, leaving the park, made her way back to her office. Later, at her computer, she typed "Stephen's Green ducks dead" into a search engine, but her inquiry yielded nothing of relevance.

She was driving home shortly after 6 P.M. with the radio set to a music station. She liked this stretch of the commute, the city traffic behind her, the winding country roads that led into Portlaoise, then out of it again. There was a particular house that drew her eye each evening, a house of the same period and style as their own, early-nineteenth-century Georgian, but better tended. In winter, candles in glass jars hung from holly trees, and now, in late spring, daffodils bloomed on either side of the long avenue. This evening, as she drove past, she felt not inspired but admonished. If it was still light by the time they finished dinner, she would attempt a clear-up of the beehives in the southwest corner of their property. She would ask Finn to help her; it might take his mind off all things dead. They could paint the hives different colors, use them as planting boxes; she had no desire to keep bees. Items of beekeeping equipment—a suit, a veiled hat, a smoker—had been among the things left behind in the shed, and she'd taken this as evidence that the people who had lived here before were beekeepers, but perhaps it was better evidence that they were not; that they were, at best, failed beekeepers. And for no reason that she could point to she knew that the beekeeping paraphernalia hadn't belonged to the same person as the pony trap; these things, she was sure, were the leavings of two different people, the discarded parings of two separate lives.

It had rained earlier in the afternoon, a light drizzle, and the three steps that led to the front door were slippery. Above the door, just below the box that housed the burglar alarm, was a domed copper bell. The rope pull was missing, but the metal tongue remained, and she was still startled occasionally, in strong winds, by a shrill, high note. Letting herself into the hall, she thought she detected the smell of something cooking, something other than potatoes and peas. Bill came out of the

kitchen to greet her. "Guess what," he said. "I've got an interview."

"That's great," she said, trying not to look too surprised, because she'd begun to suspect that he no longer applied for jobs. "What's it for?"

"A position at the museum in Athy."

"The museum?" she said, puzzled. "You mean in the accounts department?"

"It's more hands on," he said. "Cataloguing exhibits, working on the archives, that sort of thing."

Careful, she warned herself, careful how you play this. Mentally, she had already begun to calculate the cost of his return bus fare, adding to it the cost of new work clothes, the cost of paying someone to mind their son. To buy a little time, she busied herself with hanging her coat on a peg and then, turning to him again, said, "Where's Finn?"

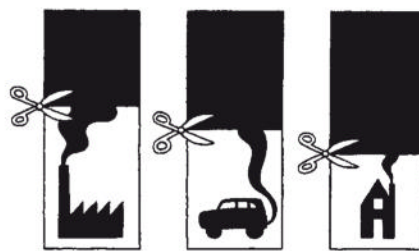
"He's in the kitchen," Bill said, "worrying about ducks." He began to walk back down the hall, and she followed him. "So how much does the job pay?" she asked, doing her best to sound casual.

"They said we can discuss salary at the interview."

"But they do actually pay?"

"Of course." He halted in the doorway of the kitchen and frowned. "You could try to sound more pleased," he said. "You wanted me to get a job. Well, that's what I'm doing."

She felt like telling him that this had nothing to do with want; that what either of them might have wanted had



stopped being relevant a long time ago. "Sorry," she said, "I just ... you know ... When is the interview?"

"Tomorrow at four. Which means I'll need to leave here just after three."

"But who will look after Finn?"

"I thought you could take the afternoon off."

"I have appointments," she said. "If I'd had more notice ... " She saw then that Finn was sitting at the kitchen table, and that the thing he had on a plate in

front of him, which at first glance she'd taken for a soft toy, was in fact a dead bird. Easy does it, she thought, deep breaths. She went over and stood beside him. He looked up from poking the bird with a fork, and smiled. It was small and dark, with black and brown feathers, its pinkish claws curled. "Did you catch it in your net?" she said. She pictured it dropping from the sky, the taut bounce as it rose only to fall back again.

"No," he said, "I found it by the river."

She watched as he plucked a feather from the bird's belly. "What are you doing?" she said. "It might be diseased."

"It *is* diseased," he said. "It's got plague." He was pulling out feathers in swift sharp yanks, leaving a clearing of pink-hued skin bubbled with goose bumps. He picked up a knife and prodded the cleared patch as if he were about to make an incision. "O.K.," she said. "That's enough, get it off the table right now." Behind her, Bill was taking something from the oven. It was the first time he had cooked properly in weeks. She watched as he peeled the foil cover from a roasting tin, and when the rush of steam dispersed she saw that it was a chicken.

After dinner, Bill disappeared into the room off the kitchen that they used as a TV room. She had abandoned the idea of interesting Finn in the beehives; he'd eaten his potatoes and peas, then taken the feathered cadaver out to the garden, where he sat examining it, so engrossed that she didn't have the heart to take it from him. She washed up before joining Bill in the TV room. It was a small space that might once have been a maid's room, and was easier to heat than the larger rooms at the front. Bill was sitting in an armchair, toasting his socked feet on the bars of an electric fire. The husband of one of her colleagues had taken a job in Dubai last year. It was difficult, of course, her colleague had said, but every second month she left the kids with her mother and flew out for a week. In three years' time, they would be back on their feet; it would be worth it. Looking at Bill now, sitting there reading one of his art journals, she wished that he would go to Dubai, too; it shocked her, the force with which she wished this, as did the composure with which she found herself contemplating it. She went to a cupboard and took out a bottle of brandy left over from Christmas, and poured a measure

for herself, another for him. He took the glass from her, but said nothing.

"Maybe you could take Finn with you tomorrow?" she said.

He looked up from his journal. "Turn up with a kid in tow? I might as well not bother."

And she saw now how this would unfold, how anytime in the future that she hinted he should get a job it would come back to this: he'd wanted to, he'd tried, she'd thwarted it. She took a mouthful of brandy. "I think you should go," she said.

"What about your appointments?"

"I can't get out of the first one, but I'll ask someone to cover the later ones. Put on one of Finn's DVDs for him. I'll be home by three-thirty."

"You mean leave him on his own?"

She was tempted to say that it wouldn't be very different from any other day. As best as she could tell, Bill mostly seemed to leave the boy to his own devices. "It's only for half an hour," she said. "He'll be fine. Give him his lunch before you go."

"I give him his lunch every day," he said. He was silent for a moment, and then he said, "You really think I should go?"

"Yes," she said, "I do."

"O.K., then," he said. "I will."

The pony trap had most likely belonged to a woman called Eliza Harriet Smithwick, who, according to the title deeds, had been granted a life interest in the house and a hundred acres as part of a marriage settlement in 1886. An ancestor of hers had acquired the land from the Earl of Mountrath for the princely sum of eighty pounds, ten shillings. Oh, how she and Bill had laughed with the solicitor about that—eighty pounds, ten shillings!—because it was possible for anything to be funny in those days, anything at all. They'd bought in those last few weeks before the crash, when the market, like a ball in flight, had quietly, imperceptibly stopped rising, had hung for a millisecond at the peak of its trajectory before it began to drop.

She was thinking about this as she drove too fast up the avenue the following evening, her knuckles white on the steering wheel. It was just after five-fifteen. Nobody had been able to cover her appointments, or, more accurately, nobody had been willing to. It was like that at work lately: everybody pretending busyness, everybody watching, the



"This is money—get ready to worry about it for the rest of your life."

way children in a parlor game watch the chairs, knowing that the music could stop at any moment. Bill had telephoned at two, inquiring as to the whereabouts of a particular blue shirt. "Be sure to lock the doors," she'd said, to which he'd replied that he always locked them, this being a downright lie. She didn't tell him that she'd be late.

As it turned out, the front door was locked. Stepping into the hall, she heard canned laughter and the soundtrack of a cartoon. "Hey, Finn," she called, putting down her briefcase. She hung up her coat and looked into the TV room. A plate of peas was abandoned on the floor beside the armchair. A DVD was playing, but the room was empty. "Finn?" she called again. "Finn, sweetheart, Mom's home." He wasn't in his bedroom, either. She went from room to room upstairs, then downstairs again, where, in the dining room, she noticed the curtains moving and saw that the window was open.

She continued to call his name as she circled the house and garden. She climbed through the post-and-rail fence and into the wasteland next door. From where she stood, she could see as far as

the rough track that ran along the river, and, in the next field, the rows of unfinished houses. She cupped her hands around her mouth. "Finn!" she shouted.

A man was walking at speed along the track, breaking now and again into a run. He veered off and came toward her, his head bent, his hands in the pockets of his anorak. He was in his thirties, she guessed, with straggly brown hair and a reddish-brown beard, a colony of pimples on one cheek. "I heard you calling him," he said. "I know where he is."

"Where?" she said.

"Over there." He pointed to the houses. "I seen him earlier." His anorak was torn, and he was wearing dirty gray trainers and no socks.

"Thank you," she said curtly. She took a step forward, but he remained positioned in front of her.

"I seen you going off in your car sometimes," he said. "In the mornings."

She wondered if this was an attempt to intimidate her, but he was grinning, the grin open and a little vacuous, and she decided he was probably harmless. "Yes," she said, "that's right. I work in the city." She stepped around him and walked quickly in an effort to put some distance



between them, picking her way over a coil of discarded wire that wound snakelike through the grass. He caught up and walked alongside her, so close that his arm brushed against hers. She would run to one of the occupied houses if he got awkward, she decided; she was nearer to them now than she was to her own house.

"Through here," the man said. He had scurried ahead, and was pulling wide an opening in the chain-link fence. He was as eager as a child, smiling as he held the mesh open, and she noticed that his wrists were frail and thin and scarred. She stooped to fit through the gap, and as she did she felt his hand,

briefly, on the small of her back. In the next field, dozens of houses stretched out in front of her. Most of the windows had been smashed, and they stood blind in the late-afternoon light, surrounded by weeds and litter. There, still, were the refuse sacks she remembered from before, but there was no van, nothing to suggest that anyone was living here. The man led her across ground strewn with cans and broken glass to a house in the middle of a row. "In here," he said, climbing over a window ledge, but she shook her head. The earth beneath the ledge was churned up, indented with footprints of various sizes. "Where's my son?" she said.

The man was standing in what had likely been intended as a sitting room. The floor was rough concrete, and seeds blown into its crevices had taken root, weeds pushing up through cracks. She saw in one corner a mug that belonged to Finn and next to it the jacket that her sister had given him for his birthday. How long had he been coming to this place? she wondered. How long had he been hanging out with this man? Because the man's belongings were here, too—clothes, cardboard boxes, a sleeping bag—all piled in the center of the room. She took a deep breath. "You told me you saw him," she said. "Now, can you please tell me where he is?" He picked up a metal rod from a pile of rubbish and struck it on the floor a couple of times. Swinging it back and forth, he crossed the room to the fireplace. She saw then that a thing she had taken for a bundle of rags was a dog stretched out, dead, its head at an odd angle to its body. There was a large bald circle on its back and, in the center of the circle, a wine-colored spot, like a birthmark, fading into softer reds and pinks as it radiated outward. Gripping the rod in both hands, the man raised it high, then brought it down again, piercing the dog through the stomach.

"Where is he?" she screamed, banging the window ledge with her fist. "What have you done with him?"

He stared at her blankly and rubbed the back of one hand across his eyes, as if he'd just woken. "He was here this morning," he said.

She turned and ran, back to the gap in the fence, tripping on the way, falling and tearing her tights. Her hands were shaking as she struggled to part the wire mesh and squeeze through. When she'd gone a little distance, she stopped to catch her breath. She looked behind to see if the man was following, but there was no sign of him. She stood for a moment and tried to think what to do. It was possible that while she'd been here Finn had returned home, climbed back in through the window, and was there now, waiting for her, or for his father, who would be home shortly. It was also possible that he was down by the river, searching for dead things, so absorbed in his activities that he hadn't heard her. Other possibilities crowded in on the heels of these, but she pushed them aside. She looked toward their house and saw it as a stranger

might: an abandoned outpost, stately but diminished, plundered. The sun had moved lower in the sky, and now it caught the glass of the windows, causing them to blaze as if they'd been set alight. For a moment, she imagined she saw the face of a woman pressed against a pane. What became of Eliza Harriet Smithwick, she wondered, and what would she think if she saw what had been done to her house and her gardens. She became aware of a stinging pain in her leg and, looking down, noticed that her knee was bleeding. "Finn!" she shouted.

And then she heard it: a yell, a small, joyous bellow of trumpeting delight that was her son's voice, coming from the direction of the river. She turned and saw him cresting the grassy embankment above the water, sun reflecting off the near-white blond of his hair. She began to run toward him. He had a stick in his hand, and he was waving it in the air like a sword and making whooping noises. She was within a dozen yards of him before she realized that he was not alone. Lying on the grass, reading, was a slim, tanned woman of about thirty. Sunlight filtered through the trees, parting the shadows along the bank, streaking her long hair. The woman raised her eyes from her book. It was a Bible bound in brown leather, and before she closed it and sat up she marked her page with a yellow ribbon. "Hello," she said, shading her eyes with her hand. "Isn't it a glorious day? We thought it a shame to stay indoors." Finn waved to his mother but didn't go to her. He seated himself next to the woman and picked up a magazine from a pile on the ground.

Was it possible that they could have been here all this time and not heard her calling? She was conscious of her torn tights, her bleeding leg, the incongruity of her tailored jacket and pencil skirt, here where everything was peaceful, where sunlight dappled her child's blond head and weeds in flurries of blue and white bloomed along the riverbank. She crouched beside her son and hugged him. "Finn," she said, "I was so worried about you." He smiled but, shrugging away her arms, continued to read. Not knowing what to do, she settled herself next to him, tucking her legs underneath her to hide the bloodied knee. The preacher woman's legs were bare, she noticed, bare and brown. She won-

dered if Finn had simply climbed out the window to the woman or if she, before luring him, Pied Piper style, across the fields, had climbed in. She pictured her going from room to room, sitting at the mahogany table under the ravaged chandelier, her green catlike eyes, which, yes, were ridiculously like Angelina Jolie's, taking in all the brokenness. "We come down here sometimes when the weather is good," the woman said. "Finn knows the names of everything—insects, birds, plants. He's a walking encyclopedia."

Stay away from my son, she wanted to say, stay away from him with your beasts and your lakes of fire and your pestilence. Instead, she said, "Yes, he's an exceptionally bright child." And, because in the silence that followed it seemed that something more was expected of her, she gestured to a cluster of purple flowers with yellow hearts that grew a few feet away. Possibly, they were violets; she had never been good with plants. "They're beautiful, aren't they?" she said.

The woman smiled. She picked up her Bible, opening it not to the place she had marked but to a different page, and began to read. "Consider the lilies of the field," she said, "how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." There was a soft, swishing sound, the sound of someone moving through long grass. Bill was making his way toward them across the wasteland, his jacket thrown over one shoulder, his gait relaxed, unhurried. "Dad!" Finn shouted, and he jumped up and ran to his father.

She kept her eyes on her husband until she knew he was near enough to have seen her, and when he didn't wave or call out she turned away. She lay back on the grass and looked up. A flock of small birds, starlings perhaps, were flying in an arrow formation above the trees. As she watched, they drew close together to form a dark, quivering orb. For a moment, they appeared freeze-framed, as if someone had pressed pause, and, just as she thought that they would surely fall, they scattered like gunshot across the evening sky. ♦

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THE CRITICS



THE CURRENT CINEMA

HOSTILE TERRITORY

"Queen of Earth" and "The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution."

BY ANTHONY LANE

The first shot of Catherine (Elisabeth Moss), the presiding figure in *"Queen of Earth,"* is not a pretty sight. Her face, filling the screen, is a war zone of tears and maddened makeup, and her voice cracks with every plea and plaint: "Why are you doing this to me?" and "I don't want you to see me like this"—quite a statement, with the camera looming as close as a confessor. She is in the throes of being rejected by her boyfriend, James (Kentucker Audley), who—both in this opening scene and elsewhere—is barely half a character. His motives are of little consequence; he is a mere moon, striving to free himself from Catherine's gravitational pull. Good luck to him.

The bulk of the film, which was written and directed by Alex Ross Perry, takes place after the breakup. Catherine, who has also lost her father—"a prominent New York artiste," in her words—seeks refuge in a peaceful lakeside house with her pal Virginia (Katherine Waterston). It belongs to Virginia's family, and the two women are mostly there alone. Catherine draws and paints, while Virginia looks after her—or, at any rate, looks *at* her, standing by her bedside while she sleeps and gazing at her with an air of mystification. Now and then, their idyll, such as it is, gets interrupted. A neighbor called Rich (Patrick Fugit) has a habit of dropping by, making out with Virginia, and getting on Catherine's nerves. Also, we keep cutting to flashbacks from the year before, when

Catherine, sporting scarlet lipstick, with her hair cropped short, came to stay at the house, bringing James. Supposedly, it was a cheerier occasion, and there was a brightness to Catherine that has now been overcast by her fug of grief; yet even then the mood was brittle, with Virginia looking at the happy couple and declaring, "You seem cripplingly codependent." (Has anyone ever spoken such a line, as opposed to writing it?) To which Catherine replied, "We don't."

If the studio heads at Twentieth Century Fox wanted to save money this year, they should have bought *"Queen of Earth"* and released it instead of *"Fantastic Four."* You want rolling mayhem, with a quartet of characters in the thrall of outlandish forces they can barely control? Meet Catherine, Virginia, Rich, and James—superheroes of unpleasantness, who can wreck the most basic of social encounters. Cups are hurled against a wall or tossed into the lake. At a party, Catherine chokes on potato chips and crawls from the room on her hands and knees, amid jeers and leers, with not a single guest lending assistance. Virginia on other humans: "Once they become envy drains, I have to have nothing to do with them, I can't help it. I just hate them." Catherine to Rich: "You pry into the lives of others to conceal how worthless and boring your own life is." She adds, by way of a kicker, "You are why depression exists." Rich to Catherine: "Stuck-up brat." Catherine to Virginia: "Spoiled brat." The whole

thing heats up into a competition: Which brat is worst?

Fans of Alex Ross Perry will point out that hostility is his natural terrain, that people in his films are born to bridle, and that, if you want niceness, you could always stay home and watch *"Pillow Talk."* After all, Perry's previous work, *"Listen Up Philip,"* by introducing an ambitious young writer to an established older one, Ike Zimmerman, showed what happens when a burgeoning monster of egotism meets the fully grown breed. But that was a funny movie, with a voice-over that dangled its foolish creatures for our delight, whereas *"Queen of Earth"* is slightly less amusing than smallpox. We get in-jokes (Virginia reads Zimmerman's *"Madness and Women"*) but no jokes; plenty of onscreen laughter, fissuring into hysteria, but no laughs. The intensity is compounded by the sound editing, which turns every slurp of coffee into a deafening slosh, and by the creepy dedication of the camera, which never retreats to a polite distance when it can lean in and stare at someone, face to face.

The model here is Bergman. You cannot banish a couple of women, one of them nearing mental dissolution, to rural solitude without raising the ghosts of Liv Ullmann and Bibi Andersson, in *"Persona."* As Catherine describes her "self-perpetuating cycle of defeat," it is the listening Virginia on whom we focus: a very Bergmanish device, forcing us to ask whether other souls, with their endless anxieties, are there to be suffered or sympathized with. That uncertainty survives in *"Queen of Earth."* When Catherine rubs her head and talks of "bones grinding underneath my skin," you want to stop the movie and summon professional help, yet at other times she comes across as a spoiled little rich girl, and there isn't a flicker of the wider world—nothing to match the unforgettable shot of Ullmann, in *"Persona,"* huddled in the corner of a room and shrinking in horror from the images on TV. That film also made emotional sense as a study of a patient and her nurse, whereas when Catherine calls Virginia "my best friend" I simply didn't buy it; nothing in their conduct speaks of good companionship, still less of love. For some viewers, the acidity level of Perry's movie will be too

ABOVE: TAMARA SHOPSIN



Seeking refuge, finding mayhem: Elisabeth Moss plays a troubled young woman in Alex Ross Perry's new movie.

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high to stomach. For others—anyone who thinks that there are too many warm hugs in Strindberg, for example—“Queen of Earth” awaits.

The release of “The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution” is well timed. Next year will mark half a century since Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale founded the Black Panthers, in Oakland, California. Even those who opposed or feared them would be hard pressed to claim that the grievances from which the movement sprang—the economic subjection of African-Americans, and humiliation at the hands of the authorities—have been answered, let alone assuaged. Many aging Panthers are interviewed in Stanley Nelson’s documentary, and one of them describes a typical recruit to the cause: “The brother who’s going to jail, just snatched out of his car for a traffic ticket, just because he was black—that’s who we’re after.” If you asked them about the recent unrest in Ferguson, Missouri, or indeed about Sandra Bland, who was pulled over in Waller County, Texas, in July, and later died in police custody, I doubt that they would show much surprise.

With no narrator to shepherd us along, the movie feels noisy and restless. The period is revived by a wealth of songs on the soundtrack, and by the sleek and succulent Panther look. The black beret, the leather jacket, the bountiful hair: has any demeanor made such an impact, so fast? And who, if anyone, dreamed it up? Nelson doesn’t say, which is a shame, but photographers came flocking, and he is at liberty to feast on the images, both still and moving, that ensued. According to the film, it was Newton, wise to legal statutes, who realized that arms could be borne on public property, as long as they were openly displayed; this meant that the Panthers could stroll into the California state legislature, say, with weapons poised. How better to make a spectacle of yourself? A teen-ager named Michael McCarty was impressed. “When I heard about Sacramento, I was, like, *damn*, these brothers are bad,” he recalls. “They’re here up in Sacramento, in the capitol? Packing?”

So fluent are McCarty and his fellow-recollectors, and so evident is Nel-

son’s nostalgia for a fervid era, that anyone wanting a balanced account of the Panthers’ exploits may find the film more rousing than reliable. The 1969 police raid on a Panthers hangout, in Los Angeles, is presented entirely as a one-sided affair; any input from the other side is dismissed by Wayne Pharr, who was then in the house, with an easy shrug. “My gun just went off,” he says. “I don’t know what happened, it just went off.” As for Eldridge Cleaver, the most eloquent of the Panthers, you can understand why people warmed to the blaze of his charisma and still recoil from the misogyny of his youth; in an admission absent from the film, he claimed to have “started out by practicing on black girls in the ghetto” before moving onto “white prey,” on the principle that “rape was an insurrectionary act.” By contrast, there were some episodes in the saga of the Panthers that allowed no ambiguity. Whatever you think of Seale (one of the so-called Chicago Eight, tried for conspiracy and incitement to riot, in 1969), the sight of him being bound and gagged in the courtroom, as he tried to defend himself, should remain a permanent scar on the public conscience.

So who will be swayed by Nelson’s film? First, kids emerging from “Straight Outta Compton,” all fired up, and wanting to learn about earlier manifestations of rage. (Not that the Panthers reaped financial fruit, of the sort that would be plucked by their hip-hop descendants. The most successful feat in Panther history was also the most prosaic: serving free breakfasts to the children of the poor.) Second, any writers and directors who like to delve for stories among the folk who live and protest at the heart of political frenzy. Imagine what Ava DuVernay, the maker of “Selma,” could do with the tale of Elaine Brown, who chaired the Black Panthers between 1974 and 1977. “I was a cocktail waitress in a white strip club two years before I joined the Black Panther Party,” she says. “How did that happen?” Boom. There’s a whole movie, right there. ♦

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A CRITIC AT LARGE

COLLEGE CALCULUS

What's the real value of higher education?

BY JOHN CASSIDY



If there is one thing most Americans have been able to agree on over the years, it is that getting an education, particularly a college education, is a key to human betterment and prosperity. The consensus dates back at least to 1636, when the legislature of the Massachusetts Bay Colony established Harvard College as America's first institution of higher learning. It extended through the establishment of "land-grant colleges" during and after the Civil War, the passage of the G.I. Bill during the Second World War, the expansion of federal funding for higher education during the Great Society era, and President Obama's efforts to make college

more affordable. Already, the cost of higher education has become a big issue in the 2016 Presidential campaign. Three Democratic candidates—Hillary Clinton, Martin O'Malley, and Bernie Sanders—have offered plans to reform the student-loan program and make college more accessible.

Promoters of higher education have long emphasized its role in meeting civic needs. The Puritans who established Harvard were concerned about a shortage of clergy; during the Progressive Era, John Dewey insisted that a proper education would make people better citizens, with enlarged moral imaginations. Recently, as wage stagnation

and rising inequality have emerged as serious problems, the economic arguments for higher education have come to the fore. "Earning a post-secondary degree or credential is no longer just a pathway to opportunity for a talented few," the White House Web site states. "Rather, it is a prerequisite for the growing jobs of the new economy." Commentators and academic economists have claimed that college doesn't merely help individuals get higher-paying jobs; it raises wages throughout the economy and helps ameliorate rising inequality. In an influential 2008 book, "The Race Between Education and Technology," the Harvard economists Claudia Goldin and Lawrence F. Katz argued that technological progress has dramatically increased the demand for skilled workers, and that, in recent decades, the American educational system has failed to meet the challenge by supplying enough graduates who can carry out the tasks that a high-tech economy requires. "Not so long ago, the American economy grew rapidly and wages grew in tandem, with education playing a large, positive role in both," they wrote in a subsequent paper. "The challenge now is to revitalize education-based mobility."

The "message from the media, from the business community, and even from many parts of the government has been that a college degree is more important than ever in order to have a good career," Peter Cappelli, a professor of management at Wharton, notes in his informative and refreshingly skeptical new book, "Will College Pay Off?" (PublicAffairs). "As a result, families feel even more pressure to send their kids to college. This is at a time when more families find those costs to be a serious burden." During recent decades, tuition and other charges have risen sharply—many colleges charge more than fifty thousand dollars a year in tuition and fees. Even if you factor in the expansion of financial aid, Cappelli reports, "students in the United States pay about four times more than their peers in countries elsewhere."

Despite the increasing costs—and the claims about a shortage of college graduates—the number of people attending and graduating from four-year educational institutions keeps going up.

As the supply of college grads expands, many are taking jobs that shouldn't require a degree.

In the 2000-01 academic year, American colleges awarded almost 1.3 million bachelor's degrees. A decade later, the figure had jumped nearly forty per cent, to more than 1.7 million. About seventy per cent of all high-school graduates now go on to college, and half of all Americans between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four have a college degree. That's a big change. In 1980, only one in six Americans twenty-five and older were college graduates. Fifty years ago, it was fewer than one in ten. To cater to all the new students, colleges keep expanding and adding courses, many of them vocationally inclined. At Kansas State, undergraduates can major in Bakery Science and Management or Wildlife and Outdoor Enterprise Management. They can minor in Unmanned Aircraft Systems or Pet Food Science. Oklahoma State offers a degree in Fire Protection and Safety Engineering and Technology. At Utica College, you can major in Economic Crime Detection.

In the fast-growing for-profit college sector, which now accounts for more than ten per cent of all students, vocational degrees are the norm. DeVry University—which last year taught more than sixty thousand students, at more than seventy-five campuses—offers majors in everything from multimedia design and development to health-care administration. On its Web site, DeVry boasts, “In 2013, 90% of DeVry University associate and bachelor's degree grads actively seeking employment had careers in their field within six months of graduation.” That sounds impressive—until you notice that the figure includes those graduates who had jobs in their field before graduation. (Many DeVry students are working adults who attend college part-time to further their careers.) Nor is the phrase “in their field” clearly defined. “Would you be okay rolling the dice on a degree in communications based on information like that?” Cappelli writes. He notes that research by the nonprofit National Association of Colleges and Employers found that, in the same year, just 6.5 per cent of graduates with communications degrees were offered jobs in the field. It may be unfair to single out DeVry, which is one of the more reputable for-profit education providers. But the example illus-

trates Cappelli's larger point: many of the claims that are made about higher education don't stand up to scrutiny.

“It is certainly true that college has been life changing for most people and a tremendous financial investment for many of them,” Cappelli writes. “It is also true that for some people, it has been financially crippling. . . . The world of college education is different now than it was a generation ago, when many of the people driving policy decisions on education went to college, and the theoretical ideas about why college should pay off do not comport well with the reality.”

No idea has had more influence on education policy than the notion that colleges teach their students specific, marketable skills, which they can use to get a good job. Economists refer to this as the “human capital” theory of education, and for the past twenty or thirty years it has gone largely unchallenged. If you've completed a two-year associate's degree, you've got more “human capital” than a high-school graduate. And if you've completed a four-year bachelor's degree you've got more “human capital” than someone who attended a community college. Once you enter the labor market, the theory says, you will be rewarded with a better job, brighter career prospects, and higher wages.

There's no doubt that college graduates earn more money, on average, than people who don't have a degree. And for many years the so-called “college wage premium” grew. In 1970, according to a recent study by researchers at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, people with a bachelor's degree earned about sixty thousand dollars a year, on average, and people with a high-school diploma earned about forty-five thousand dollars. Thirty-five years later, in 2005, the average earnings of college graduates had risen to more than seventy thousand dollars, while high-school graduates had seen their earnings fall slightly. (All these figures are inflation-adjusted.) The fact that the college wage premium went up at a time when the supply of graduates was expanding significantly seemed to confirm the Goldin-Katz theory that technological change was creating an ever-increasing demand

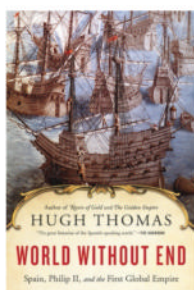
for workers with a lot of human capital.

During the past decade or so, however, a number of things have happened that don't easily mesh with that theory. If college graduates remain in short supply, their wages should still be rising. But they aren't. In 2001, according to the Employment Policy Institute, a liberal think tank in Washington, workers with undergraduate degrees (but not graduate degrees) earned, on average, \$30.05 an hour; last year, they earned \$29.55 an hour. Other sources show even more dramatic falls. “Between 2001 and 2013, the average wage of workers with a bachelor's degree declined 10.3 percent, and the average wage of those with an associate's degree declined 11.1 percent,” the New York Fed reported in its study. Wages have been falling most steeply of all among newly minted college graduates. And jobless rates have been rising. In 2007, 5.5 per cent of college graduates under the age of twenty-five were out of work. Today, the figure is close to nine per cent. If getting a bachelor's degree is meant to guarantee entry to an arena in which jobs are plentiful and wages rise steadily, the education system has been failing for some time.

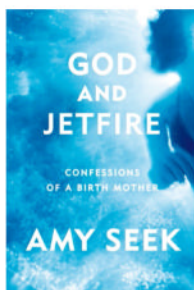
And, while college graduates are still doing a lot better than nongraduates, some studies show that the earnings gap has stopped growing. The figures need careful parsing. If you lump college graduates in with people with advanced degrees, the picture looks brighter. But almost all the recent gains have gone to folks with graduate degrees. “The four-year-degree premium has remained flat over the past decade,” the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland reported. And one of the main reasons it went up in the first place wasn't that college graduates were enjoying significantly higher wages. It was that the earnings of non-graduates were falling.

Many students and their families extend themselves to pay for a college education out of fear of falling into the low-wage economy. That's perfectly understandable. But how sound an investment is it? One way to figure this out is to treat a college degree like a stock or a bond and compare the cost of obtaining one with the accumulated returns that it generates over the years. (In this case, the returns come in the form of wages over and above those earned by

BRIEFLY NOTED



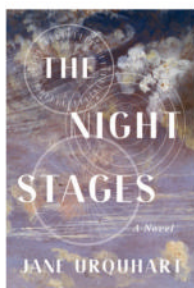
WORLD WITHOUT END, by Hugh Thomas (Random House). Thomas concludes his three-volume history of the Spanish Empire with Philip II's expansion of his territory in the late sixteenth century. Sweeping across the Americas to the Philippines, Spain built the largest empire since the Romans, and maintained it, in an unparalleled feat of bureaucracy, for three centuries. Thomas challenges historical views of the empire as unflinchingly cruel and rapacious, noting particularly the educational achievements of the Jesuits. The aim is less apology than a full accounting of a complex, often baffling story, one in which conquistadores binge-read chivalric romance novels; Indians pursue litigation to settle disputes with their conquerors; and committees convene to discuss the King's right to invade China.



GOD AND JETFIRE, by Amy Seek (Farrar, Straus & Giroux). As a college student, Seek gave up her newborn in an open adoption. Everyone in this piercing memoir—Seek's ex-boyfriend, her dying father, the generous and dedicated adoptive parents, and the earnest and observant person her son becomes—tries fiercely and exhaustively to make these relationships work. And they do. But the unanswered questions, the difficulty of communication, and the pain for the birth mother are clear. Once when she is visiting her young son, he crawls into her lap and tells her, "Amy, pretend I'm your baby." She does, "helpless and terrified." Seek's prose can be overwrought, but it is more often very beautiful and very sad.



THE HOUSEHOLD SPIRIT, by Tod Wodicka (Pantheon). In Wodicka's second novel, Howie Jeffries, divorced from his wife and dismissed by his daughter, rattles around in an isolated house in upstate New York. Emily Phane is the girl next door, but not in a wholesome way. An orphan brought up by her grandfather, she suffers from a disorder called sleep paralysis. After her grandfather dies, she forms a bond with Howie, and they become all things to each other (almost) while simultaneously helping each other to move on. Wodicka's troubled characters are sympathetic, and his sentences are funny and surprising: "Lesbians loved driving one another around"; "There was a collection of beer mugs from all over the world, but mostly Milwaukeee."



THE NIGHT STAGES, by Jane Urquhart (Farrar, Straus & Giroux). Several plotlines compete for top significance in this fragmented novel, and overlap at the image of a woman standing in front of an airport mural on a weather-delayed layover. The woman, Tam, is a former war pilot; she is at the airport because she is leaving her lover, Niall. But the story's focus is on the struggles of the mural's artist, the real-life Canadian painter Kenneth Lochhead, and on the troubled relationship between Niall and his brother Kieran, who is missing. The novel picks up speed and purpose as it follows Kieran's preparations for a demanding bicycle race. For the patient reader, there are delicate, satisfying revelations to be had.

people who don't hold degrees.) When the research firm PayScale did this a few years ago, it found that the average inflation-adjusted return on a college education is about seven per cent, which is a bit lower than the historical rate of return on the stock market. Cappelli cites this study along with one from the Hamilton Project, a Washington-based research group that came up with a much higher figure—about fifteen per cent—but by assuming, for example, that all college students graduate in four years. (In fact, the four-year graduation rate for full-time, first-degree students is less than forty per cent, and the six-year graduation rate is less than sixty per cent.)

These types of studies, and there are lots of them, usually find that the financial benefits of getting a college degree are much larger than the financial costs. But Cappelli points out that for parents and students the average figures may not mean much, because they disguise enormous differences in outcomes from school to school. He cites a survey, carried out by PayScale for *Businessweek* in 2012, that showed that students who attend M.I.T., Caltech, and Harvey Mudd College enjoy an annual return of more than ten per cent on their "investment." But the survey also found almost two hundred colleges where students, on average, never fully recouped the costs of their education. "The big news about the payoff from college should be the incredible variation in it across colleges," Cappelli writes. "Looking at the actual return on the costs of attending college, careful analyses suggest that the payoff from many college programs—as much as one in four—is actually *negative*. Incredibly, the schools seem to add nothing to the market value of the students."

So what purpose does college really serve for students and employers? Before the human-capital theory became so popular, there was another view of higher education—as, in part, a filter, or screening device, that sorted individuals according to their aptitudes and conveyed this information to businesses and other hiring institutions. By completing a four-year degree, students could signal to potential employers that they had a certain level of cognitive competence and could carry out assigned tasks and work in a group setting. But a college education

didn't necessarily imbue students with specific work skills that employers needed, or make them more productive.

Kenneth Arrow, one of the giants of twentieth-century economics, came up with this account, and if you take it seriously you can't assume that it's always a good thing to persuade more people to go to college. If almost everybody has a college degree, getting one doesn't differentiate you from the pack. To get the job you want, you might have to go to a fancy (and expensive) college, or get a higher degree. Education turns into an arms race, which primarily benefits the arms manufacturers—in this case, colleges and universities.

The screening model isn't very fashionable these days, partly because it seems perverse to suggest that education doesn't boost productivity. But there's quite a bit of evidence that seems to support Arrow's theory. In recent years, more jobs have come to demand a college degree as an entry requirement, even though the demands of the jobs haven't changed much. Some nursing positions are on the list, along with jobs for executive secretaries, salespeople, and distribution managers. According to one study, just twenty per cent of executive assistants and insurance-claims clerks have college degrees but more than forty-five per cent of the job openings in the field require one. "This suggests that employers may be relying on a B.A. as a broad recruitment filter that may or may not correspond to specific capabilities needed to do the job," the study concluded.

It is well established that students who go to elite colleges tend to earn more than graduates of less selective institutions. But is this because Harvard and Princeton do a better job of teaching valuable skills than other places, or because employers believe that they get more talented students to begin with? An exercise carried out by Lauren Rivera, of the Kellogg School of Management, at Northwestern, strongly suggests that it's the latter. Rivera interviewed more than a hundred recruiters from investment banks, law firms, and management consulting firms, and she found that they recruited almost exclusively from the very top-ranked schools, and simply ignored most other applicants. The recruiters didn't pay much attention to things like grades and majors. "It

was not the content of education that elite employers valued but rather its prestige," Rivera concluded.

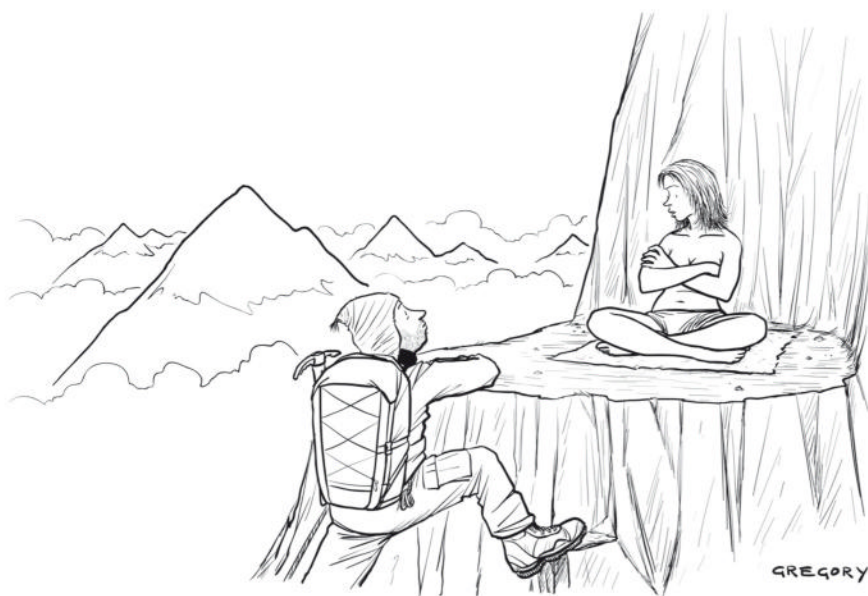
If higher education serves primarily as a sorting mechanism, that might help explain another disturbing development: the tendency of many college graduates to take jobs that don't require college degrees. Practically everyone seems to know a well-educated young person who is working in a bar or a mundane clerical job, because he or she can't find anything better. Doubtless, the Great Recession and its aftermath are partly to blame. But something deeper, and more lasting, also seems to be happening.

In the Goldin-Katz view of things, technological progress generates an ever-increasing need for highly educated, highly skilled workers. But, beginning in about 2000, for reasons that are still not fully understood, the pace of job creation in high-paying, highly skilled fields slowed significantly. To demonstrate this, three Canadian economists, Paul Beaudry, David A. Green, and Benjamin M. Sand, divided the U.S. workforce into a hundred occupations, ranked by their average wages, and looked at how employment has changed in each category. Since 2000, the economists showed, the demand for highly educated workers declined, while job growth in low-paying occupations increased strongly. "High-skilled workers have moved down the occupational ladder

and have begun to perform jobs traditionally performed by lower-skilled workers," they concluded, thus "pushing low-skilled workers even further down the occupational ladder."

Increasingly, the competition for jobs is taking place in areas of the labor market where college graduates didn't previously tend to compete. As Beaudry, Green, and Sand put it, "having a B.A. is less about obtaining access to high paying managerial and technology jobs and more about beating out less educated workers for the Barista or clerical job." Even many graduates in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics—the so-called STEM subjects, which receive so much official encouragement—are having a tough time getting the jobs they'd like. Cappelli reports that only about a fifth of recent graduates with STEM degrees got jobs that made use of that training. "The evidence for recent grads suggests clearly that there is no overall shortage of STEM grads," he writes.

Why is this happening? The short answer is that nobody knows for sure. One theory is that corporate cost-cutting, having thinned the ranks of workers on the factory floor and in routine office jobs, is now targeting supervisors, managers, and other highly educated people. Another theory is that technological progress, after favoring



"Don't you want to hear about the day I had?"

highly educated workers for a long time, is now turning on them. With rapid advances in processing power, data analysis, voice recognition, and other forms of artificial intelligence, computers can perform tasks that were previously carried out by college graduates, such as analyzing trends, translating foreign-language documents, and filing tax returns. In "The Second Machine Age" (Norton), the M.I.T. professors Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee sketch a future where computers will start replacing doctors, lawyers, and many other highly educated professionals. "As digital labor becomes more pervasive, capable, and powerful," they write, "companies will be increasingly unwilling to pay people wages that they'll accept, and that will allow them to maintain the standard of living to which they've been accustomed."

Cappelli stresses the change in corporate hiring patterns. In the old days, Fortune 500 companies such as General Motors, Citigroup, and I.B.M. took on large numbers of college graduates and trained them for a lifetime at the company. But corporations now invest less in education and training, and, instead of promoting someone, or finding someone in the company to fill a specialized role, they tend to hire from outside. Grooming the next generation of leadership is much less of a concern. "What employers want from college graduates now is the same thing they want from applicants who have been out of school for years, and that is job skills and the ability to contribute now," Cappelli writes. "That change is fundamental, and it is the reason that getting a good job out of college is now such a challenge."

Obtaining a vocational degree or certificate is one strategy that many students employ to make themselves attractive to employers, and, on the face of it, this seems sensible. If you'd like to be a radiology technician, shouldn't you get a B.A. in radiology? If you want to run a bakery, why not apply to Kansas State and sign up for that major in Bakery Science? But narrowly focussed degrees are risky. "If you graduate in a year when gambling is up and the casinos like your casino management degree, you probably have hit it big," Cappelli writes. "If they aren't hiring when you graduate, you may be even worse off get-

ting a first job with that degree anywhere else precisely because it was so tuned to that group of employers." During the dot-com era, enrollment in computer-science and information-technology programs rose sharply. After the bursting of the stock-market bubble, many of these graduates couldn't find work. "Employers who say that we need more engineers or IT grads are not promising to hire them when they graduate in four years," Cappelli notes. "Pushing kids into a field like health care because someone believes there is a need there now will not guarantee that they all get jobs and, if they do, that those jobs will be as good as workers in that field have now."

So what's the solution? Some people believe that online learning will provide a viable low-cost alternative to a live-in college education. Bernie Sanders would get rid of tuition fees at public universities, raising some of the funds with a new tax on financial transactions. Clinton and O'Malley would also expand federal support for state universities, coupling this funding with lower interest rates on student loans and incentives for colleges to hold down costs. Another approach is to direct more students and resources to two-year community colleges and other educational institutions that cost less than four-year colleges. President Obama recently called for all qualified high-school students to be guaranteed a place in community college, and for tuition fees to be eliminated. Such policies would reverse recent history. In a new book, "Learning by Doing: The Real Connection between Innovation, Wages, and Wealth" (Yale), James Bessen, a technology entrepreneur who also teaches at Boston University School of Law, points out that "the policy trend over the last decade has been to starve community colleges in order to feed four-year colleges, especially private research universities." Some of the discrepancies are glaring. Richard Vedder, who teaches economics at Ohio University, calculated that in 2010 Princeton, which had an endowment of close to fifteen billion dollars, received state and federal benefits equivalent to roughly fifty thousand dollars per student, whereas the nearby College of New Jersey got benefits of just two thousand dollars per student. There are

sound reasons for rewarding excellence and sponsoring institutions that do important scientific research. But is a twenty-five-to-one difference in government support really justified?

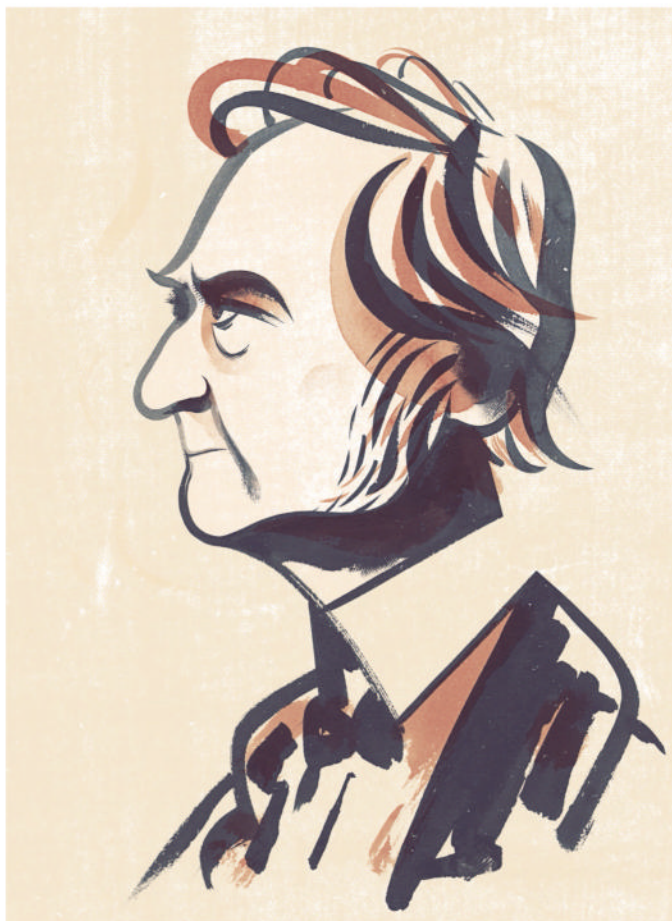
Perhaps the strongest argument for caring about higher education is that it can increase social mobility, regardless of whether the human-capital theory or the signalling theory is correct. A recent study by researchers at the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco showed that children who are born into households in the poorest fifth of the income distribution are six times as likely to reach the top fifth if they graduate from college. Providing access to college for more kids from deprived backgrounds helps nurture talents that might otherwise go to waste, and it's the right thing to do. (Of course, if college attendance were practically universal, having a degree would send a weaker signal to employers.) But increasing the number of graduates seems unlikely to reverse the over-all decline of high-paying jobs, and it won't resolve the income-inequality problem, either. As the economist Lawrence Summers and two colleagues showed in a recent simulation, even if we magically summoned up college degrees for a tenth of all the working-age American men who don't have them—by historical standards, a big boost in college-graduation rates—we'd scarcely change the existing concentration of income at the very top of the earnings distribution, where C.E.O.s and hedge-fund managers live.

Being more realistic about the role that college degrees play would help families and politicians make better choices. It could also help us appreciate the actual merits of a traditional broad-based education, often called a liberal-arts education, rather than trying to reduce everything to an economic cost-benefit analysis. "To be clear, the idea is not that there will be a big financial payoff to a liberal arts degree," Cappelli writes. "It is that there is no guarantee of a payoff from very practical, work-based degrees either, yet that is all those degrees promise. For liberal arts, the claim is different and seems more accurate, that it will enrich your life and provide lessons that extend beyond any individual job. There are centuries of experience providing support for that notion." ♦

ECSTASY OF INFLUENCE

Ralph Waldo Emerson's American poetry.

BY DAN CHIASSON



In January of 1842, Ralph Waldo Emerson's firstborn child, Waldo, contracted scarlet fever and died within a week. He was five. He had been his father's exuberant companion, who had, Emerson wrote, "touched with his lively curiosity every trivial fact & circumstance in the household." Henry David Thoreau, who had lodged with the Emersons, "charmed Waldo by the variety of toys whistles boats popguns & all kinds of instruments which he could make & mend." The death was a shock to the entire village of Concord, Massachusetts. When the nine-year-old Louisa May Alcott came to the Emersons' door to ask about Waldo, she was greeted, she

wrote, by an Emerson "worn with watching and changed by sorrow." All he said was "Child, he is dead." Alcott called it her "first glimpse of a great grief."

But the grief did not feel real, or real enough, to Emerson. "I chiefly grieve that I cannot grieve," he wrote in a letter the following week. The loss of Waldo spurred an essay, "Experience," that contains one of the most startling passages in American literature:

The only thing grief has taught me, is to know how shallow it is. That, like all the rest, plays about the surface, and never introduces me into the reality, for contact with which, we would even pay the costly price of sons and lovers. Was it Boscovich who found out that bodies never come in contact? Well, souls never touch their

objects. An innavigable sea washes with silent waves between us and the things we aim at and converse with. Grief too will make us idealists. In the death of my son, now more than two years ago, I seem to have lost a beautiful estate,—no more. I cannot get it nearer to me. If tomorrow I should be informed of the bankruptcy of my principal debtors, the loss of my property would be a great inconvenience to me, perhaps, for many years; but it would leave me as it found me,—neither better nor worse. So is it with this calamity: it does not touch me: some thing which I fancied was a part of me, which could not be torn away without tearing me, nor enlarged without enriching me, falls off from me, and leaves no scar. It was caducous. I grieve that grief can teach me nothing, nor carry me one step into real nature.

This seems nearly callous, but that's the point. Emerson had suffered tragic deaths before, and, partly as a result, had developed a theory of spiritual profit and loss: surely the greatest costs led to the richest benefits? When "a great man," he wrote in "Compensation," an earlier essay, is "pushed, tormented, defeated, he has a chance to learn something; he has been put on his wits, on his manhood; he has gained facts; learns his ignorance; is cured of the insanity of conceit; has got moderation and real skill." But Waldo's death was so profound that it went uncompensated, even by grief. It taught Emerson "nothing"; it was almost as though his son had never existed. Unluckily, swiftly, even happily, life goes on, only mildly "inconvenienced" by the most devastating loss imaginable.

"Experience" has a knife's-edge, emergency intensity that is nowhere to be found in Emerson's poems, collected in "Ralph Waldo Emerson: The Major Poetry" (Harvard), edited by Albert J. von Frank. Prose was a zone of fruitful conflict for Emerson, who began his public life writing sermons. He entered Harvard Divinity School in 1825, at the age of twenty-one, to prepare for a career in the Unitarian ministry. Soon he was struck by a painful eye disease, likely caused by tuberculosis, and submitted to two cataract operations. According to Robert D. Richardson's "Emerson: The Mind on Fire," Emerson's reading in Hume, and his knowledge of the "brilliantly clever arguments of Cicero," began to erode his faith. His days were "slipping past him, one by one, in an irrevocable procession," Richardson writes. He knew that the "proper emotion" wasn't humility or even skepticism but "wonder."

Emerson's essays are like wonder

Emerson paved the way for poets of genius, but his own brilliance lay elsewhere.

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Emerson also wrote a poem about Waldo, “Threnody.” It is often quite beautiful, but it is dressed almost entirely in period costume. The period was the eighteen-forties, and the costume was woody, “native,” and politely anti-European. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who returned from Europe to teach modern languages at Harvard, was considered a boldly American poet: he wrote epics about Miles Standish and the expulsion of the Acadians from Nova Scotia. To Emerson’s contemporaries, experimentation in poetry meant writing about “the bobolink and the humble-bee” rather than the English nightingale and the skylark, which, as Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Emily Dickinson’s correspondent and early advocate, wrote, Americans “might never have seen or heard anywhere.”

By these standards, “Threnody,” with its tableaux of American village life, is a masterpiece. Instead of nymphs and dryads, here are the rudiments of New England hill, garden, and scrub forest:

On that shaded day,
Dark with more clouds than tempests are,
When thou didst yield thy innocent
breath
In birdlike heavings unto death,
Night came, and Nature had not thee;
I said, ‘We are mates in misery.’
The morrow dawned with needless glow;
Each snowbird chirped, each fowl must
crow;
Each tramper started; but the feet
Of the most beautiful and sweet
Of human youth had left the hill
And garden,—they were bound and still.

This is one of the first inventories in verse of a distinctly New England winter, its “needless glow” awakening the tinny chirps of native snowbirds. Those unforgettable “birdlike heavings” of the child’s final breaths puncture a frigid silence known to anybody from Emerson’s neck of the woods. The image is borrowed from his journals, roused to this new formal occasion yet maintaining its fringe of untransformed anguish. But the poem quickly stifles its desperation in the prescribed comforts of noble sentiment and regular music.

The listlessness of Emerson’s poetry is surprising, given the veneration he expressed for the art. Some of his best prose is devoted to lobbying for the special advantages of poetry. These works are thrilling because they are written in thrilling sentences. This does not necessarily imply that Emerson’s poetry will be thrilling, though he must have intended his large claims for poetry to be tested on his own work. Like many of his essays, “The Poet” was printed with an original short lyric as its epigraph. The mediocrity of these poem-epigraphs is often emphasized by the essays’ attempts to honor them as superior forms of expression. It makes for a strangely rigged contest between turbocharged prose and the rickshaw verse it ostensibly reveres. Emerson’s “poet”—a “complete man,” a “man without impediment,” a “sayer” and “namer,” like Adam—would not have printed the lacklustre verses appended to “The Poet,” which venerate “Olympian bards” and “divine ideas” with rhymes as bouncy as a Super Ball.

In “Merlin I,” written, like “The Poet,” in the eighteen-forties, Emerson plays the unwinnable game of arguing in metre against metre and in rhyme against rhyme:

Thy trivial harp will never please
Or fill my craving ear;
Its chords should ring as blows the breeze,
Free, peremptory, clear.
No jingling serenader’s art,
Nor tinkle of piano strings,
Can make the wild blood start
In its mystic springs.

Emerson kept an Aeolian harp in a window of his house. He intended to build in verse its equivalent, an instrument that nature could play. But the

instrument itself was old-fashioned, gaudy, and domestic.

Emerson's ideas were obviously badly served by the rickety verse structures he built for them. Seeing them strain and buckle under the weight of his mind and ambition led him, in "The Poet," to call not only for a new kind of poem, which, at least in theory, he could have written, but for a wholly new kind of person, a person he wasn't and didn't want to become. His best poems—"Each and All," "Brahma," "The Rhodora," "The Snow-Storm"—are refinements of oratory to the special rhetorical technologies of poetry. But his quicksilver prose *was* poetry, its sentences like signal flares launched one after another into the ether. What he says about the poet is truer of those astonishing prose performances:

For it is not metres, but a metre-making argument, that makes a poem,—a thought so passionate and alive, that, like the spirit of a plant or an animal, it has an architecture of its own, and adorns nature with a new thing. The thought and the form are equal in the order of time, but in the order of genesis the thought is prior to the form. The poet has a new thought: he has a whole new experience to unfold; he will tell us how it was with him, and all men will be the richer in his fortune. For, the experience of each new age requires a new confession, and the world seems always waiting for its poet.

This passage, like so many in his great essays, describes itself, its own idiosyncratic "architecture." This is what Emerson meant when he called for a literature of "insight and not of tradition." Each sentence is an innovation, "a new thing." Emerson didn't want to write poems about the New World. He wanted poems to make the world new. It is fascinating, therefore, to see how he ar-

ranged for his own swift obsolescence. His poems sometimes feel intentionally slight, as though making way for the accelerating future, still at his back but quickly gaining on him. His prose was poetry by other means, calling for its own mirror image, a poetry whose "argument" trumped its forms.

Emerson was not the poet he had in mind in "The Poet." In 1840, Alexis de Tocqueville had prophesied an American poetry free of "legendary lays," "old traditions," "supernatural beings," masks, and personifications. Americans led "petty" and "insipid" lives, "crowded with paltry interests": their lives were "anti-poetic." The only subject possible for an American poet was humankind; luckily, as Tocqueville wrote, "the poet needs no more." Emerson, who spent most of his life cultivating the aura of an elder, called for "a brood of Titans" who would "run up the mountains of the West with the errand of genius and love."

In July of 1855, Emerson got the poet he'd been calling for. He picked up a parcel from the Concord post office which contained the first edition of "Leaves of Grass," sent anonymously from Brooklyn by its author. The book was unsigned, though there was a frontispiece portrait, the name "Walter Whitman" on the copyright page, and, inside, the jubilant line "Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos." After a little hunting, Emerson found Whitman's name and the address of his distributor in a newspaper advertisement. He then wrote his famous letter to Whitman, welcoming

him to immortality: "I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere for such a start."

In response, Whitman published the letter in the book's next edition, along with twenty new poems and his own open letter to Emerson of several thousand words celebrating "that vast basis of the supremacy of Individuality—that new moral American continent" whose "shores you found":

I say you have led The States there—have led Me there. I say that none has ever done, or ever can do, a greater deed for The States, than your deed. Others may line out the lines, build cities, work mines, break up farms; it is yours to have been the original true Captain who put to sea, intuitive, positive, rendering the first report, to be told less by any report, and more by the mariners of a thousand bays, in each tack of their arriving and departing, many years after you.

Whitman was a fact of American life from that moment forward. It took a little longer for an equally important disciple to surface: Emily Dickinson, who treasured an edition of Emerson's poems given to her by an admirer, and whose brother and sister-in-law, Austin and Susan Dickinson, had hosted Emerson many times at their handsome house, the Evergreens, just across the field from her home. Of course, Dickinson's poems sound nothing like Emerson's. He provided, for the wild synaptic activity of his protégés, the framework. He was their server. If Emerson's poems had been just a little better than they were, we might not have American literature as we know it. Our greatest writers, seeing their own visions usurped, might have been content to remain his readers. ♦

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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Charlie Hankin, must be received by Sunday, September 6th. The finalists in the August 24th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the September 21st issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the United States, Canada (except Quebec), Australia, the United Kingdom, or the Republic of Ireland age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"You don't need English on every shot."
Nate Suri, Westfield, N.J.



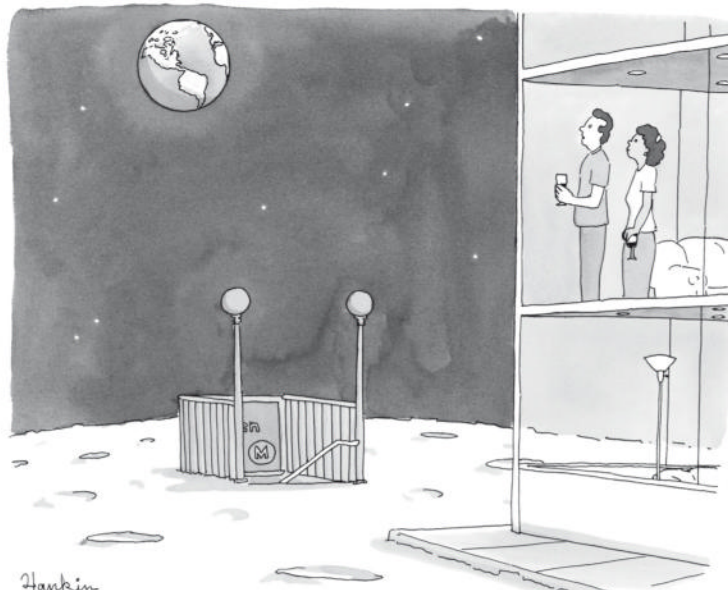
THE FINALISTS

"I don't mind, but Harald's allergic."
Shannon Flood, Denver, Colo.

"Will he bite?"
Leslie Golberg, Reno, Nev.

*"Wait for my command, and
then release the hound."*
Bruce Brittain, Atlanta, Ga.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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